

PROTESTRA

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Community Chords: String Orchestra Music from Around the World

VINCENT HO | Five Sketches of Mischievous Imps

World Premiere

TERESA CARREÑO | Serenade for String Orchestra

FELA SOWANDE | African Suite

JESSIE MONTGOMERY | Strum

Saturday

December 16

@ 2:00 PM

**St. Paul's German Church
315 W 22nd Street
New York, NY**



Sunday

December 17

@ 2:00 PM

**Third Street Music School
235 E 11th Street
New York, NY**



**In Partnership with
EV Loves NYC Food Kitchen**

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This project is made possible in part with funds from Creative Engagement, a regrant program supported by the the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) in partnership with the City Council, the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) with the support of the office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, and administered by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC).



**NYC Cultural
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PROGRAM

Strum (2006, rev. 2012) - Jessie Montgomery

Serenade for Strings (1895) - Teresa Carreño

Andante – Andante con moto

Allegro vivace

Andantino (Recitativo) – Agitato molto

Tempo di marcia

~~~ **Intermission** ~~~

**Five Sketches of Mischievous Imps (2021) - Vincent Ho**

**\*\*\*World Premiere\*\*\***

**Michelle Rofrano, conductor**



**African Suite (1944) - Fela Sowande**

**Joyful Day**

**Nostalgia**

**Lullaby**

**Onipe**

**Akinla**

**Christina Morris, conductor**

**Tiffany Wu, harp**



## **Violin I**

**Samuel Gray, Concertmaster**

**Allison Dubinski**

**Salome Lomidze**

**Melody Lin**

**Sharon Gunderson**

**Maggy Simon**

**Inês Ayer**

**Samuel Nelson**

## **Viola**

**Linnea Marchie, Principal**

**Jack Rittendale**

**Heather Wallace**

**Rayna Fishman**

**Shia-He Lin**

**Alyssa Yuge**

**Katherine Topping**

**Rachel Schachtman**

## **Bass**

**Mort Cahn, Principal**

**Ian Fales**

## **Harp**

**Tiffany Wu**

## **Music Director**

**Michelle Rofrano**

## **Violin II**

**Nina Liu, Principal**

**Dario Cazzani**

**Kira Hall**

**Lou Barker**

**Jocelyn Rosado**

**Sathvi Ramaseshan**

**Jessica Beberaggi**

**Jade Schoolcraft**

**Rachel Feldhaus**

## **Cello**

**Stephen Dorff, Principal**

**Jennie Davis**

**Halie Morris**

**George Dewar**

**Rahel Lulseged**

## **Assistant Conductor**

**Christina Morris**

## **ABOUT PROTESTRA**

**First assembled in 2017 and formally incorporated in 2020, PROTESTRA is a volunteer-run orchestra and 501(c)(3) organization. PROTESTRA's grassroots orchestral benefit concerts inspire activism by contextualizing classical music performance through multimedia education, and turn voluntary audience donations into targeted support for mission- and policy-driven groups related to the concerts' themes. PROTESTRA prioritizes diversity, equity, inclusion, representation, and accessibility in both its hiring and programming practices. Additionally, PROTESTRA maintains a robust social media presence, creating and sharing original content and resources with 9,000+ followers across multiple platforms.**

**[CLICK HERE](#) to donate to PROTESTRA**

## **ABOUT EVLoves NYC**

**EVLoves NYC is a group of friends who began cooking and sharing meals with neighbors in need during the first weeks of the pandemic lockdown. Over the past three years, we've provided nearly half a million hot meals and eight million pounds of groceries to food insecure New Yorkers. We still feed NYC's food insecure, partnering with more than 85 organizations (churches, mosques, community fridges, mutual aids, etc.) that serve the most challenged populations of our city. 3,000+ volunteers have spent their Sundays working in our East Village kitchen, preparing, cooking and packaging hot meals for distribution throughout the five boroughs.**

**Our numbers sound impressive, but we're actually a pretty small group. We work hard to challenge the forces that keep some New Yorkers poor and hungry. We support and advocate for asylum seekers arriving here to be part of a better future. We love New York and we believe in a united city where everyone has each other's backs. Help spread the love by supporting us in any way you can.**

**[CLICK HERE](#) to donate to EVLoves NYC**

## COMPOSER BIOS



**Michelle Rofrano** is an Italian-American conductor with a keen interest in the intersection of art, storytelling, and social activism. An avid opera conductor, upcoming engagements in the 2023-24 season include debuts leading Cenerentola with Toledo Opera, L'Amant Anonyme with Madison Opera, Turandot with Fargo Moorhead Opera, and a return to the Curtis Institute of Music leading a double bill of Les Mamelles de Tirésias and The Seven Deadly Sins. Recent projects include conducting The Turn of the Screw with the Curtis Institute, Amelia al Ballo with the Juilliard School, La Traviata and Cendrillon (Viardot) with City Lyric Opera, The Fall of the House of Usher (Glass) with Orpheus PDX, Don Quichotte at Camacho's Wedding (Telemann) with Opera Saratoga, and both Trouble in Tahiti and new Francesca Zambello production of The Queen of Spades with The Glimmerglass Festival. In 2022-23, Rofrano was involved in several exciting experimental opera projects, including conducting the meditative opera Song of the Ambassadors (Skye/Allado-McDowell) at Alice Tully Hall, a groundbreaking opera in development that interweaves music, science, and technology; and music directing the recorded project No One Is Forgotten: An Immersive Opera, the first opera designed for 3D Spatial Audio adapted from the original play by Winter Miller and co-composed by Paola Prestini and Sxip Shirey. Rofrano has previously served as cover conductor with companies such as San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, The Glimmerglass Festival, Spoleto Festival USA, Florida Grand Opera, and Opera Birmingham. A champion of social progress in the field of classical music, Rofrano is the Founder and Artistic Director of PROTESTRA, an activist orchestra that advocates for social justice through diverse programming and benefit performances. She is also a co-creator of Girls Who Conduct, an initiative that mentors young women and non-binary musicians in an effort to achieve gender parity on the conducting podium.



## COMPOSER BIOS



**Christina Morris** studied conducting under Maestro Micheal Tilson Thomas as a conducting apprentice of the 2018 National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America. In 2019 she conducted at the Miami Music Festival as a participant of their Conducting Institute lead by Mark Gibson. Christina has recently attended the Tanglewood Music Festival Conducting Seminar led by Stefan Asbury and Andris Nelsons and was invited to return the summer of 2022. Additionally, she has attended a conducting workshop with Neeme Järvi and the New World Symphony in the Spring of 2022 and returned to work with Micheal Tilson Thomas in the fall of 2022. She has been asked to guest conduct nonprofit organization orchestras in NYC. She has studied at Juilliard with Mark Shapiro and continues to study with him privately. Christina's overall goal as an artist is to ignite and expose the classical music community to the possibility of change. As an aspiring orchestral conductor with a unique background in the classical music industry, she is looking to promote the artistic value of underrepresented and underestimated identities. Her overall goal as an artist is to ignite and expose the classical music community to the possibility of change or what she considers, true diversity.

## COMPOSER BIOS & PROGRAM NOTES



### **Jessie Montgomery (American, b. 1981)**

**Jessie Montgomery is an acclaimed composer, violinist, and educator. She is the recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Award from the ASCAP Foundation, the Sphinx Medal of Excellence, and her works are performed frequently around the world by leading musicians and ensembles. Her music interweaves classical music with elements of vernacular music, improvisation, poetry, and social consciousness, making her an acute interpreter of 21st century American sound and experience. Her profoundly felt works have been described as “turbulent, wildly colorful and exploding with life” (The Washington Post).**

**Her growing body of work includes solo, chamber, vocal, and orchestral works. Some recent highlights include Shift, Change, Turn (2019) commissioned by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Coincident Dances (2018) for the Chicago Sinfonietta, and Banner (2014)—written to mark the 200th anniversary of “The Star-Spangled Banner”—for The Sphinx Organization and the Joyce Foundation, which was presented in its UK premiere at the BBC Proms on 7 August 2021.**

**cont....**

**Summer 2021 brought a varied slate of premiere performances, including Five Freedom Songs, a song cycle conceived with and written for Soprano Julia Bullock, for Sun Valley and Grand Teton Music Festivals, San Francisco and Kansas City Symphonies, Boston and New Haven Symphony Orchestras, and the Virginia Arts Festival (7 August); a site-specific collaboration with Bard SummerScape Festival and Pam Tanowitz Dance, I was waiting for the echo of a better day (8 July); and Passacaglia, a flute quartet for The National Flute Association's 49th annual convention (13 August).**

**Since 1999, Jessie has been affiliated with The Sphinx Organization, which supports young African American and Latinx string players and has served as composer-in-residence for the Sphinx Virtuosi, the Organization's flagship professional touring ensemble.**

**A founding member of PUBLIQuartet and a former member of the Catalyst Quartet, Jessie holds degrees from the Juilliard School and New York University and is currently a PhD Candidate in Music Composition at Princeton University. She is Professor of violin and composition at The New School. In May 2021, she began her three-year appointment as the Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.**

**Strum is the culminating result of several versions of a string quintet I wrote in 2006. It was originally written for the Providence String Quartet and guests of Community MusicWorks Players, then arranged for string quartet in 2008 with several small revisions. In 2012, the piece underwent its final revisions with a rewrite of both the introduction and the ending for the Catalyst Quartet in a performance celebrating the 15th annual Sphinx Competition.**

**cont....**

**Originally conceived for the formation of a cello quintet, the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within Strum, I utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a texture motive and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration.**

**Program notes by the composer**



**Teresa Carreño (Venezuelan, 1853–1917)**

**Born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1853, María Teresa Gertrudis de Jesús Carreño García was a highly celebrated pianist known by the moniker "Valkyrie of the Piano" because of her spirited playing, presence, and dual singing career. Due to political upheaval in Venezuela, her family moved to New York City in 1862. The eight-year-old Carreño made her NYC debut in Irving Hall that same year, which also helped to save the family from financial ruin. An immediate sensation, she completed a concert tour of Cuba that same year. She performed for Abraham Lincoln at the White House in 1863, precociously complaining to the President about the quality of the piano. She would later perform for President Woodrow Wilson, as well, in 1916.**

**cont'd....**



**After declining a teaching offer from Franz Liszt, her family moved to Paris in 1866, where Carreño studied instead under famed teachers George Mathias (a student of Chopin) and Anton Rubinstein. In 1872, Carreño “accidentally” became an opera singer, too, when she was convinced to sing the role of Queen in a performance of Les Huguenots at the last minute. Her opera career took off after that, and she moved back to Venezuela with her second husband, where they started an opera company together—one where she both sang and conducted.**

**Carreño finished her Serenade for String Orchestra on September 13, 1895, during a summer stay in Pertisau, a small village in the Austrian Alps. A profound yet compelling composition, it belongs to the tradition of serenades for string ensembles that can be traced back to works such as Mozart's Eine kleine Nachtmusik. However, Carreño offers a free-spirited reinterpretation of the genre by means of a bold Romantic language, giving preëminence to musical expression and harmonic exploration over pre-established rules of formal construction.**

**The first movement begins with a slow (andante) and declarative introduction, similar to many Romantic-era works, including Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings. Then leads us to a memorable lilting theme that evolves from Eb minor to Eb major over the course of the movement, ending with modal elements that return us to the stately opening theme. The second movement follows a classic “A-B-A” structure, opening and closing with a vibrant scherzo theme. The B section showcases exceptionally fast and technically advanced scales juxtaposed against a tuneful melody. Our introduction to the third movement is a gorgeous cello cadenza worthy of a Romantic-era cello concerto. This segues into a beautiful, nostalgic theme that is passed around the orchestra. The finale presents variations on a march-like theme similar to that of the first movement, evolving from E-flat minor to a triumphant finish in E-flat major.**

**cont'd....**

**The entire work features virtuosic and flashy playing for strings, surprising harmonic elements, and romantic and memorable melodies that weave their way around the different sections of strings.**

**Program notes by Natasha Loomis, Michelle Rofrano, and Cayambis Music Press**



### **Vincent Ho (Chinese-Canadian, b. 1975)**

**Vincent Ho is a multi-award winning composer of orchestral, chamber, vocal, and theatre music. His works have been described as “brilliant and compelling” by The New York Times and hailed for their profound expressiveness and textural beauty, leaving audiences talking about them with great enthusiasm. His many awards and recognitions have included four Juno Award nominations, Harvard University’s Fromm Music Commission, The Canada Council for the Arts’ “Robert Fleming Prize”, ASCAP’s “Morton Gould Young Composer Award”, four SOCAN Young Composers Awards, and CBC Radio’s Audience Choice Award (2009 Young Composers’ Competition).**

**During the period of 2007-2014, Dr. Ho has served as the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra’s composer-in-residence and has presented a number of large-scale works that have generated much excitement and critical praise. His Arctic Symphony has been described “as a beautiful work that evokes the Far North in a very special way” (John Corigliano), and “a mature and atmospheric work that firmly establishes Ho among North American composers of note” (Winnipeg Free Press).**

**cont’d....**

**His percussion concerto, titled *The Shaman*, composed for Dame Evelyn Glennie was hailed as a triumph, receiving unanimous acclaim and declared by critics as “spectacular” (The New York Classical Review), “a powerhouse work” (The Winnipeg Free Press), and “rocking/mesmerizing...downright gorgeous” (The Pittsburgh Gazette). His second concerto for Glennie titled *From Darkness To Light*, Ho’s musical response to the cancer illness, was lauded as “a lasting masterpiece of sensitivity and perception” (Winnipeg Free Press). His cello concerto, *City Suite*, composed for Canadian cellist Shauna Rolston, has received similar praise with critics calling it “thrilling” (Windsor Star) and “overflowing with striking ideas...the most successful piece heard at this year’s Festival” (Classical Voice America).**

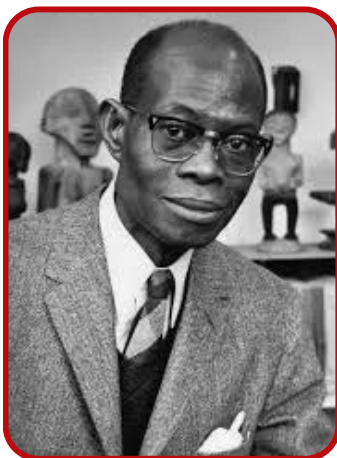
**Born in Ottawa, Ontario, in 1975, Vincent Ho began his musical training through Canada’s Royal Conservatory of Music, where he earned his Associate Diploma in Piano Performance. He gained his Bachelor of Music from the University of Calgary, his Master of Music from the University of Toronto, and his Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Southern California. His mentors have included Allan Bell, David Eagle, Christos Hatzis, Walter Buczynski, and Stephen Hartke. In 1997, he was awarded a scholarship to attend the Schola Cantorum Summer Composition Program in Paris, where he received further training in analysis, composition, counterpoint, and harmony, supervised by David Diamond, Philip Lasser, and Narcis Bonet.**

**In his free time, he enjoys running, reading, traveling, dancing, hiking, playing chess, and learning the keyboard works of Bach, Beethoven, Ravel, and Ligeti (among many others). He is also an enthusiast of old-time radio shows, photography, crime noir, Zen art, jazz, Jimi Hendrix, graphic novels, and Stanley Kubrick films. Dr. Ho has taught at the University of Calgary and currently serves as Artistic Director to Land’s End Ensemble. His works are published and managed by Promethean Editions Ltd and Theodore Presser Company.**

**cont’d....**

**Five Sketches of Mischievous Imps** was commissioned with young players in mind (ages 12–18). He therefore decided to compose short fanciful sketches that explore novel sounds that could be drawn from a string orchestra while introducing young players to modern techniques. This work builds upon his previous work, **Three Sketches of Mischievous Imps**, adding two new movements. PROTESTRA is thrilled to present the world premiere of this new, expanded work!

**Program notes by the composer and Michelle Rofrano**



### **Fela Sowande (Nigerian, 1905–1987)**

**Chief Olufela Obafunmilayo Sowande, better known as Fela Sowande, was born on May 29, 1905, in Abeokuta, Nigeria. He grew up learning music in the church under the guidance of his father Emmanuel, who was a musician and Anglican priest. As a teenager, Sowande earned a scholarship to study organ at the Royal College of Organists in London and relocated in 1934 to further his studies.**

**Sowande flourished in London. He achieved many honors, such as earning his Bachelor's degree in music at the University of London and a fellowship with the Trinity College of Music. Sowande served as a leader in his field and in 1945 was appointed choirmaster at the West London Mission of the Methodist Church. He used his position to integrate music based on Nigerian folk tunes into church services to appeal to a more diverse congregation. This would also be the start of Sowande's exploration in music composition.**

**cont'd....**

**Sowande composed his African Suite in 1944. Although straightforward in terms of Western harmony and form, Sowande's use of traditional African folk rhythms and themes creates a seamless duality within his music. The combination of two distinguishable musical influences led to the creation of Sowande's unique musical language, which had the ability to engage a more diverse audience from both Western European and Afro-originating backgrounds.**

**In the first movement, titled "Joyful Day," we witness his use of a 3 against 2 hemiola to create an interesting polyrhythmic sound. The primary melody is based on a theme by Ghanaian composer Dr. Ephraim Amu titled "Enne Ye Anigye Da" ("This is a Joyful Day"). The use of polyrhythmic hemiolas is not only found in Dr. Amu's work, but is also particularly common in African folk music. The second movement, "Nostalgia," is an original melody, a slow, pastoral movement set in 5/4 time that depicts Sowande's memory of his home in Nigeria. The third movement, "Lullaby," is based off of a famous Nigerian lullaby sung by Ms. Charity Bailey. The melody is passed back and forth between solo violin and orchestra. This movement is set in "A-B-A" rondo form, which is quite commonly used in nursery rhymes. The fourth movement, "Onipe," is named after a city in Nigeria. In this movement, we again find a 3 against 2 hemiola, this time infused within a sweet and lighthearted melody (based on another song by Dr. Ephraim Amu).**

**"Akinla," the finale of this suite, is explosively energetic; appropriately, the word "akinla" refers to people who are lively, spirited, adventurous, and spontaneous. Again showing his versatility, here Sowande merges the European compositional technique "theme and variations" with "Highlife," a 20th-century Nigerian style that combined Western colonial military and popular music with West African elements. The combination of Sowande's West African background and his Western musical education prove that these two very different influences can co-exist in one compositional space.**

**cont'd....**



**The harp, not typically considered part of a string orchestra, is a special addition to Sowande's African Suite, and I submit two possible explanations as to why he decided to add it. Between the late 19th and mid-20th century, European composers—particularly French and Russian composers—began to include the harp in their orchestral works. As such, Sowande's decision to include the harp in his African Suite may have been an effort to join the modern influences of Western orchestration.**

**However, Sowande's overall "cultural fusion" style suggests that he intended the harp to emulate a kora, a traditional West African instrument with 21 strings that shares characteristics of both a lute and a harp. The kora has a naturally bright tone: When a kora player plucks one of its strings, it produces a sharp, percussive sound. The Western concert harp has a naturally warmer and softer tone, but Sowande cleverly uses accents to instruct the harpist to produce a brighter, more pointed tone. Throughout the suite, he also interchanges the role of the harp between melody and accompaniment; as a kora player plays both melody and accompaniment on the same instrument, this seems like another likely connection.**

**Whether Sowande included the harp to conform to modern choices in orchestration, to imitate a traditional instrument from his homeland, or both, one thing is undeniably true: Sowande's compositional style perfectly encapsulates the duality of his artistic background. In African Suite, we hear the pride Sowande had in his West African heritage infused with his exceedingly intellectual understanding and firm grasp of Western European musical traditions.**

**[Program notes by Christina Morris](#)**

**END OF COMPOSER BIOS & PROGRAM NOTES**

# **THANK YOU!!!**

**PROTESTRA would like to thank everyone who made these concerts possible and who make our organization run. Your dedication and support mean the world to us!**

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**Rachel Puelle - Board Member**

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