

Alone Together

Jennifer Koh, violin

Composer Statements

Wang Lu – *Hover and Recede*

The sound of distant sirens breaking through the peaceful night has been a constant reminder of the pandemic. I took the alternating two-note motive and transformed it into a soaring melody for the violin. This piece is dedicated to Jennifer Koh, whose masterful playing and fierce character continue to inspire me.

inti figgis-vizueta – *quiet city*

quiet city (& *easter bells from the bowery*) was finished in mid-April 2020, drawing on the sounds both present and absent from my neighborhood in Lower Manhattan. The score includes a poem, placed between the musical materials, guiding interpretation of its many spaces and short duration.

quiet digging
sun-spots, clay-fired
bright eyes shut
ambulance fading into distance
sip...of water, ache
grow (joyous), SHAKE
glass all over
into sand
sinking
reaching
lingering
fading

Ken Ueno – *Better Angels*

When Jennifer asked me to compose a solo piece for her *Alone Together* series in April 2021, an initiative in which emerging composers (mostly of underrepresented backgrounds in Classical music), are commissioned alongside their mentors as a response to how the Covid-19 pandemic devastated Classical music in 2020, I reflected on how we were at a different cultural moment than when the *Alone Together* series was initiated a year earlier: the pandemic was beginning to thaw, but a new scourge, that of violence against Asian Americans, was ramping up. In response to the new scourge, my piece starts out with aggressive music that expresses the anger and frustration I felt (and still feel) about violence directed towards us, but, then, the music gradually moves towards material from the song I wrote to conclude *Everything That Rise Must Converge* (an evening-long work for Jennifer and Davóne Tines that narrativizes their family histories as well as their experiences with racism in Classical music as a tome of allyship), *Better Angels*, a lilting salve, a horizon of hope. It seemed natural to incorporate material from *ETRMC*, as I had recently been working on it for Jennifer, and a narrative trajectory that heralds allyship seemed apt as well for *Alone Together*. For *Alone Together*, I recommended that Jennifer commission my former student, Amadeus Regucera, one of my first doctoral advisees at UC Berkeley. Amadeus is one of my former students of whom I am most proud, not only of the fine composer he has become, but also of how he has become a great teacher. He has overcome so much to accomplish all he has. Is it a measure of age that I feel more satisfaction nowadays from my students' and former students' success than my own? I am proud to have shared this premiere with him. For a composer/teacher, isn't that a measure of hope? The horizon is ever nearer - we can even see a faint marker of land up ahead. Thank you, Jennifer, for helping to move all of us ever closer. Together, we are less alone.

Anthony Cheung – *Springs Eternal*

I wrote *Springs Eternal* in the first month of the Covid-19 pandemic. In those weeks when the world shifted and everything came to a halt - and when spring cautiously delayed its arrival - hope felt like a very heavy but necessary thing to carry. Its conspicuous absence from the title reflects its complicated place in the music: a series of small breath-like swells and pauses, which lets in something unexpectedly unbroken and quietly resilient towards the end.

Nina Shekhar – *warm in my veins*

The title *warm in my veins* comes from a quote by pioneering American nurse Clara Barton in which she states, "The patriot blood of my father was warm in my veins." In the face of catastrophe, it is easy to lose sight of our essence of self and being. But our sense of identity is deep and impenetrable – the blood of our ancestors runs warm in our veins, carrying their culture, wisdom, and fieriness of spirit. Our present communities run warm in our veins. Our love for one another runs warm in our veins. And resilience will always run warm in our veins.

Tonia Ko – *The Fragile Season*

The Fragile Season came about from the simple act of looking out the window, an activity that, because of the pandemic, had taken on more meaning and richness than I ever could have imagined. It was my first year living in London and thus an introduction to what early Spring here feels like. The scene outside was beautiful yet treacherous: a cherry tree had bloomed magnificently almost overnight, and was just as quickly losing its flowers from strong winds. I spontaneously wrote the poem below, which served as a reminder for the musical goals of *The Fragile Season*: gestures swaying back and forth, timbres at once delicate and sharp, and lines that attempt to rise upward but are thwarted and diverted at every turn.

A fragile Spring:
shards of petals
scatter in panicked gusts.

Over the coming weeks
they will harden into lumps of glass,
sinking into the earth.

The season is no longer soft;
we find cracks in everything.

Rafiq Bhatia – *Descent*

Descent represents an attempt to grapple with the way time unravels in an exponential crisis. Though the initial indications—the early whispers, the unheeded warnings, the steadily mounting evidence in the face of willful ignorance—may appear to approach slowly and somewhat steadily from a distance, the problem multiplies in urgency, force, and speed as it draws nearer. As human beings, we lack an intuitive understanding of exponential growth, but catastrophes ranging from coronavirus to climate change underscore an undeniable need to make ourselves more familiar.

Kati Agócs – *Thirst and Quenching*

Thirst and Quenching was written during the early days of the pandemic while I was on lockdown with my family in Boston. I took a break from larger projects to write this work over a five-day period at the request of Jennifer Koh. Jenny and I had just worked together in Aspen the previous summer on a performance of my *Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra*. What a difference a few months make! Remembering how incredible it was to collaborate with Jenny in person, I felt paralyzed by an acute sense of loss. Needing to turn loss into gain, writing this piece was a way of capturing Jenny's astonishing musical presence from afar, and sharing it forward. *Thirst and Quenching* is a meditation on hiatus, absence, and longing. The piece establishes a suspended state with a delicately evolving metabolism, articulated by a regular rhythm that is gradually interrupted by left-handed *pizzicati* (plucks of the strings). The rhythm of these lacunae (gaps in the line) later transmutes into empty space, while the line develops into more rhapsodic and ornate melismas with *glissandi* articulating gentle sighs, conveying a sense of release. About three minutes in duration, the piece was premiered on the Alone Together program finale.

Angélica Negrón – *Cooper and Emma*

When Jennifer Koh approached me to write a micro-commission for her project "Alone Together" I felt really excited to be writing something for her but at the same time pretty overwhelmed by the many emotions I was going through at that time. I felt almost paralyzed at the thought of writing music and wasn't feeling particularly creative during such a challenging time at the beginning of the pandemic with so much uncertainty, fear, and confusion. The only way I was able to write music at this time was by deciding to take away all the pressure of composing and allowing myself to play and have fun by scoring one of my favorite videos of two adorable dogs in Germany (Cooper & Emma) jumping and playing with balloons. I set very simple parameters for myself to follow according to the video, like whenever one of the dog's snouts would touch the balloon, I would make a specific melodic or rhythmic gesture or whenever they would jump I would make another distinct gesture. This was not only incredibly liberating and a lot of fun, but also a good reminder to reconnect with the simple things that bring me joy.

Adeliia Faizullina – *Urman*

Urman was written at the beginning of the pandemic. At this time I was struggling with the ability to focus because of anxiety. I worried about my family, and I didn't know when I would be able to see them again in person.

The piece is about creating solutions through limitations. I composed this piece using a borrowed violin that didn't have a 4th or a 1st string; I only had II and III. I thought this limitation could be an interesting source for creativity.

Urman means "forest" in Tatar, my native language. When writing, I mentally went to the places where I used to go with my family, to the quiet, green woods around the city where we lived in Tatarstan, and heard the soothing sounds of birds. My musical ideas are really short, just some bird calls, different sounds of nature, such as nature, a drop, and unidentifiable, distant sounds. Because it was such a challenge to focus on big things, I explored evocative, tiny sounds. I'm very thankful for this project, which helped me to forget my anxiety for some moments, and listen to these tiny sounds, these little phrases, and try to meditate on them.

Lester St. Louis – *Ultraviolet, Efflorescent*

Ultraviolet, situated beyond the visible spectrum. Efflorescent, the action or process of developing and unfolding. When things go unseen, can they still be measured? *Ultraviolet, Efflorescent* is a crystal of the process of unseen, unmeasurable growth we will all have away from external value creation.

Sarah Gibson – *You are still here*

You Are Still Here was inspired by Mona Hatoum's artwork of the same name. The work, which is a double mirror containing the titular phrase sandblasted on the surface, allows the viewer to see their face doubled in their reflection with this phrase stamped across their view. Hatoum describes this artwork as a way to spark a conversation with oneself about the confirmation of existence and survival. This sentiment, and the need to talk to oneself about these subjects, powerfully spoke to me during the beginning of the pandemic. My work for Jennifer was a way for me to convey that dialogue, and what I was seeking in the spring of 2020: a frantic need for personal expression contrasted with a calmer desire for an empathetic space in which to create during a dark time.

Qasim Naqvi – *HAL*

When I was a teenager I was introduced to an album called *Weird Nightmare* – a supernatural reimagining of Charles Mingus' music that featured the microtonal instruments of Harry Partch. It was a record that altered my musical path in a very profound way. *Weird Nightmare* was the brainchild of producer Hal Willner. Aside from being the music coordinator for Saturday Night Live, he also produced some really unusual projects and *Weird Nightmare* was no exception. On April 6th of 2020, we lost Hal to Covid. He died a day before his 65th birthday. This piece is my thanks to you Hal. Thank you for your imagination and for sending me on a different path.

Thomas Kotcheff – *vacuum packed*

vacuum packed was written during the first 3 weeks of the COVID-19 shelter-in-place quarantine order in California. The piece contains quotations from Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35, that are recontextualized and juxtaposed against my own music that is frenetic and constantly shifting. The title *vacuum packed* is a reflection on both my personal isolation during that time as well as the piece itself being a 3-minute vacuum sealed rendering (as both an homage and a bastardization) of one of my favorite concertos.

Rajna Swaminathan – *Kindling*

As the world faces a period filled with uncertainty and tragic loss from the COVID-19 crisis, I offer this piece, like kindling to a fire, with the intention of igniting a reorientation of our ways of being. During this intense reorganization of time, space, and physical movement, it is my hope that this music can serve as a channel for the vibrancy of this stillness.

Amadeus Regucera – *While You Were Away*

This small piece speaks to my difficult, fraught winter of 2020/21. It was a moment rife with change and hurt, grief and abandonment. Now, four months removed, even though I can look back on those months with more clarity and peace, small moments of pain and panic still well up, often unexpectedly. I can breathe through these episodes, rely on loved ones if they last more than a moment, but they continue to come, and I expect they will continue to for some time. *While you were away* takes such an episode and articulates it musically, in hopes that I'll continue to work through them and keep any painful memories away. At least for a moment.

Cassie Wieland – *shiner*

This music is for anybody in need of something small and beautiful

like a tealight, or a chocolate chip, or a cheap beer on a patio full of friends.

Patrick Castillo – *Mina Cecilia's Constitutional*

The COVID-19 outbreak forced us all to adopt new, homebound routines. Blessed to have good weather and a shared courtyard outside my house in Philadelphia, I spent many mornings last spring meditatively pacing back and forth between my door and the courtyard's front gate, with my nine-month-old Mina Cecilia in the baby carrier. It was an idyllic setting, birds singing in the neighbor's dogwood tree, etc., dissonant with the pandemic ravaging our community. Come summertime, in the wake of the killing of George Floyd and the ensuing unrest just beyond our gate, the birds were drowned out by the constant drone of helicopters overhead. *Mina Cecilia's Constitutional* was composed during these spring mornings and is an attempt to reconcile their immediate tranquility with the cosmic anxiety surrounding them.

David Serkin Ludwig – *All the Rage*

I wrote *All the Rage* as a time capsule in the midst of the COVID pandemic. The title reflects the dichotomy of outrage popularity on social media with the deep sorrow and anger at the callous ineptitude of an authoritarian government. The music evokes the heavy metal wailing of electric guitars.

Few of my pieces are inspired by anger and none are without hope, but *All the Rage* substitutes catharsis for optimism at its end. As the composer the piece was my own scream into the air; an honest response to the horrors of its time.