



The Knights

Colin Jacobsen and Eric Jacobsen

Artistic Directors

Avi Avital / Mandolin

Kinan Azmeh / Clarinet

Sunday Afternoon, November 12, 2017 at 4:00

Rackham Auditorium

Ann Arbor

20th Performance of the 139th Annual Season

55th Annual Chamber Arts Series

Traditions & Crosscurrents

This afternoon's performance is supported by Ellie Serras.

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Special thanks to Mark Clague, Jonathan Kuuskoski, and Caitlin Taylor for their participation in events surrounding this afternoon's performance.

The Knights appear by arrangement with Opus 3 Artists.

In consideration of the artists and the audience, please refrain from the use of electronic devices during the performance.

The photography, sound recording, or videotaping of this performance is prohibited.

PROGRAM

Suite Upon One Note

Kinan Azmeh, Avi Avital, The Knights
Improvisation Upon One Note

Henry Purcell
Fantasia Upon One Note

Giovanni Sollima
Viaggio in Italia (excerpt)

La Camera Bianca

Mr. Avital, Mr. Azmeh

Oswaldo Golijov **Lullaby and Doina**

Alex Sopp, *flute*; Mr. Azmeh

Johann Sebastian Bach, Arr. Avi Avital **Concerto No. 1 in d minor for Harpsichord, Strings, and Continuo, BWV 1052**

Allegro
Adagio
Allegro

Mr. Avital

Intermission

Franz Schubert, Arr. Colin Jacobsen **The Shepherd on the Rock, D. 965**

Mr. Avital, Mr. Azmeh, Alex Sopp, *flute*

Kinan Azmeh **Concertino Grosso**

Azmeh **Suite for Improvisers and Orchestra** (excerpt)

November 22

Colin Jacobsen, Siamak Aghaei **Ascending Bird**

ARTIST STATEMENT

The Knights are always seeking musical adventurers — musicians, like us, who come from a deeply rooted tradition but are eager to look beyond those roots and embrace new means of expression. Mandolinist Avi Avital and clarinetist Kinan Azmeh are our ideal collaborators, bringing new awareness to their instruments through an inventive virtuosity. We're so thrilled to present a program for you tonight that embraces a wide diversity of musical languages, all while remaining rooted in our shared classical tradition.

From Europe, we will experience the pastoral longings of an alpine shepherd in one of Franz Schubert's last works, *The Shepherd on the Rock*, newly arranged in an instrumental version for The Knights with Mr. Azmeh and Mr. Avital. We will also hear some of Elizabethan England's most astonishing counterpoint and harmonies in Purcell's *Fantasia Upon One Note*. A new world premiere by Mr. Azmeh pays homage to the Baroque tradition of multiple solo voices in dialogue with the collective in his original work, *Concertino Grosso*. We also travel through the Mediterranean and Middle East with Sicilian composer Giovanni Sollima; the piece *Ascending Bird*, based on an ancient Persian parable of spiritual transcendence; and with Mr. Avital's and Mr. Azmeh's solos, improvisations, and compositions throughout the night.

— Colin Jacobsen, *artistic director*

SUITE UPON ONE NOTE:

IMPROVISATION UPON ONE NOTE (2017)

FANTASIA UPON ONE NOTE (1680)

Henry Purcell

Born September 10, 1659 in Westminster, United Kingdom

Died November 21, 1695 in Westminster

VIAGGIO IN ITALIA (EXCERPT) (2000)

Giovanni Sollima

Born October 24, 1962 in Palermo, Italy

UMS premieres: *Improvisation Upon One Note* has never been performed on a UMS concert. Purcell's *Fantasia Upon One Note*: The Scottish Ensemble; April 2013 in Hill Auditorium. Sollima's *Viaggio in Italia*: The Silk Road Ensemble; March 2013 in Hill Auditorium.

Snapshots of History...In 1680:

- Comédie-Française is founded by decree of Louis XIV of France as La maison de Molière in Paris
- The first documented tornado in America hits Cambridge, Massachusetts
- The Whigs organize processions, to burn effigies of the Pope in London

Snapshots of History...In 2000:

- The first resident crew enters the International Space Station
- The PlayStation 2 is released in Japan
- America Online purchases Time Warner for \$162 billion

This opening suite of three interconnected pieces introduces The Knights and special guests Avi Avital and Kinan Azmeh. We also get a chance to look carefully at the building blocks of music, as melody comes to the forefront of a modal improvisation over a 'C' drone note. That 'C' drone carries on throughout Purcell's kaleidoscopic counterpoint, which introduces harmony into the program, but still tied to one note.

Finally, in contemporary composer Giovanni Sollima's "La Camera Bianca," rhythm becomes the primary driving element of a piece that very much is indebted to Sicilian history as a crossroads of the Mediterranean.

Program note by Colin Jacobsen.

LULLABY AND DOINA (2001)

Osvaldo Golijov

Born December 5, 1960 in La Plata, Argentina

UMS premiere: This piece has never been performed on a UMS concert.

Snapshots of History...In 2001:

- The Netherlands' Act on the Opening up of Marriage goes into effect, allowing same-sex couples to marry legally for the first time in the world
- Nearly 3,000 people are killed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US
- The iPod is introduced by Apple; Microsoft releases Windows XP

This piece starts with a set of variations on a Yiddish lullaby that I composed for Sally Potter's film *The Man Who Cried*, set to function in counterpoint to another important music theme in the soundtrack: Bizet's aria "Je Crois Entendre Encore" from *The Pearl Fishers*. In her film, Sally explores the fate of Jews and Gypsies in Europe during the mid-years of the 20th century, through a love story between a Jewish young woman and a Gypsy young man. The lullaby metamorphoses into a dense and dark *doina* (a gypsy slow, *rubato* genre) featuring the lowest string of the violas. The piece ends in a fast gallop boasting a theme that I stole from my friends of the wild gypsy band Taraf de Haïdouks.

Program note by Osvaldo Golijov.

**CONCERTO NO. 1 IN D MINOR FOR HARPSICHORD, STRINGS,
AND CONTINUO, BWV 1052 (1730–33)**

Johann Sebastian Bach

Born March 31, 1685 in Eisenach, Germany

Died July 28, 1750 in Leipzig

Arr. Avi Avital

Born October 19, 1978 in Beersheba, Israel

UMS premiere: Chicago Symphony Baroque Orchestra conducted by Jean Martinon with Kenneth Gilbert on harpsichord; June 1967 at the Fair Lane in Dearborn.

Snapshots of History...In 1733:

- The first Freemasons lodge opens in Boston
- British colonist James Oglethorpe founds Savannah, Georgia
- The right of Canadians to keep slaves is upheld in Quebec

Bach has always been a dominant part of my musical life. It is the absolute nature of Bach's music that has given me the freedom to offer this interpretation of *Concerto No. 1 in d minor for Harpsichord, Strings, and Continuo*. The original is lost, but there are reconstructions written for violin and these feel organic to play on the mandolin. However, the music goes far beyond any given instrument.

I wanted to go further: I wanted to underline Bach's universality. My transcription falls somewhere between the harpsichord and violin versions, looking deep into the music to find out what it needs and what adaptations I can make. The d-minor Concerto involves long sections written almost continuously in semiquavers (16th notes). These carry the intensity of this incredibly dramatic piece. But if you "zoom out," you can hear the structure more clearly. I seek to give a sense of these solid, long phrases.

Bach's music is full of secrets. No matter how long you've been playing it, there is still something to discover every time. Using a different instrument allows you to hear its timelessness in a new way.

Program note by Avi Avital.

THE SHEPHERD ON THE ROCK, D. 965 (1828)

Franz Schubert

Born January 31, 1797 in Alsergrund, Vienna

Died November 19, 1828 in Vienna

Arr. Colin Jacobsen

Born 1978

UMS premiere: Soprano Roberta Peters, flutist Samuel Pratt, and pianist Warner Bass; October 1953, Hill Auditorium.

Snapshots of History...In 1828:

- Andrew Jackson is elected President of the United States
- A typhoon kills nearly 10,000 people in Kyushu, Japan
- Ányos Jedlik creates the world's first electric motor

The Knights have a special place in our hearts for Schubert, whose music lived mostly in living rooms and salons during his lifetime. The Knights' journey also began in a living room setting, and one of our missions is to attempt to transform any space that we're in — whether it's a large concert hall, a club, or public park — into one of intimacy and connection.

The Shepherd on the Rock was Schubert's penultimate composition, bursting with sweet longing and a virtuosic ebullience in the final section. The clarinet is given a large role in the original song (for voice, clarinet, and piano), helping to paint the outdoor alpine scene of a shepherd longing for his love far below in the valley. At first glance, it is hard to imagine that Schubert was on the brink of death's door while writing this song, especially in light of the opening and ending sections. However, the middle section text speaks of all hope being abandoned. Even in the coda, the

idea of springtime coming and the desire to wander to a better place could be read as Schubert hinting at his own sense of mortality. Schubert often used the sounds of the street (i.e. hurdy gurdy in *Wintereisse*) and folk music to connect both to nature and the internal life of the characters in his songs. In arranging this song, I found that the mandolin enhances this bucolic atmosphere.

Program note by Colin Jacobsen.

CONCERTINO GROSSO (2017)

Kinan Azmeh

Born June 10, 1976 in Damascus, Syria

UMS premiere: This piece has never been performed on a UMS concert.

When I was approached by the Knights to write , I immediately imagined the excitement that might come from having a collective of individuals from different musical backgrounds approach a written score with maximum freedom and flexibility.

I imagined a piece that can take a variety of forms; solo parts that are not bound by the instruments and most importantly, an interaction between the individual (soloists) and the collective (orchestra) that is spontaneous and fragile. In this piece, everyone is a decision-maker and part of the creative process while giving room to the two main characters (in this case, a clarinet and a violin) to tell their stories.

I love writing for people and not for instruments, and writing for a group that one knows, loves, and trusts is a dream for any composer. Thank you to the Knights for this beautiful opportunity.

Program note by Kinan Azmeh.

SUITE FOR IMPROVISERS AND ORCHESTRA (EXCERPT) (2007)

Azmeh

UMS premiere: These pieces have never been performed on a UMS concert.

Snapshots of History...In 2007:

- France's TGV breaks the record for the world's fastest conventional train
- Bulgaria and Romania join the European Union
- Appalachian State beats Michigan 34–32 in one of the biggest upsets in college football

“November 22” is a meditative work that depicts sonic homesickness for the familiar ambient sounds of childhood. I wrote this piece while living abroad, inspired by memory of the sounds of the market that used to exist behind my parents’ apartment in Damascus, and the way the slow and steady rhythm of life keeps moving regardless of one’s emotions.

Program note by Kinan Azmeh.

ASCENDING BIRD (2004)

Colin Jacobsen and Siamak Aghaei

Mr. Jacobsen born 1978

Mr. Aghaei born 1974 in Ahraz, Iran

UMS premiere: The Silk Road Ensemble; March 2013 in Hill Auditorium.

Snapshots of History...In 2004:

- The first confirmed wolverine sighting in the state of Michigan in 200 years is spotted by coyote hunters in Ubyly, Michigan
- Armed robbers steal paintings from the Munch Museum in Oslo, Norway
- Preliminary hearings begin in Iraq for the trial of Saddam Hussein

In the summer of 2004, I had the opportunity to visit Iran, the home of Siamak Aghaei and Kayhan Kalhor, musicians and friends that I met through Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project. The visit was a cultural exchange made possible by Silkroad and was to prove a life-changing experience. Besides learning more about traditional Persian architecture, calligraphy, arts and crafts, and their close link to Persian music, I spent many hours in the homes of both Kayhan and Siamak listening to them play and talk about the philosophy behind their music.

Siamak is a bit of a modern-day Bartok in that he travels around Iran making field recordings of folk musicians from the many and varied traditions represented by the different regions of Iran. He dusted off one such recording and the sound that emerged from the speakers gave me a form of vertigo. My ears were held to attention by the sound of an incredibly potent and piercing instrument, which Siamak told me was made out of the fused bones of a bird and measured little

more than two inches in length. The music also encoded a popular mythical story of a bird attempting to fly to the sun. Failing on the first two attempts, on the third try the bird loses its physical body in the radiant embrace of the sun, a metaphor for spiritual transcendence. What emerged from this experience was *Ascending Bird* — comprised of Siamak's reinterpretation of the traditional tune to which I added further textural layers and combined with an original introduction and coda. My first orchestration of this tune was for string quartet (Brooklyn Rider) and we recently recorded this full orchestral version (which I like to call "Big Bird") for our album *Azul*, which features our friend and mentor Yo-Yo Ma.

Program note by Colin Jacobsen.

ARTISTS

The Knights are a collective of adventurous musicians dedicated to transforming the orchestral experience and eliminating barriers between audiences and music. Driven by an open-minded spirit of camaraderie and exploration, they inspire listeners with vibrant programs that encompass their roots in the classical tradition and passion for artistic discovery. Through adventurous programming, unbridled energy, and a collaborative music-making process, The Knights bring classical music to life in a way that surprises and inspires both new and longtime listeners.

Since their inception in New York City in the early 2000s, The Knights have challenged assumptions about orchestral music. The ensemble grew out of informal chamber music readings at the home of brothers Eric and Colin Jacobsen — now the group’s artistic directors — and was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 2007. The 36 members of The Knights are graduates of the Juilliard School, the Curtis Institute of Music, and other leading music schools and conservatories. They are accomplished soloists, orchestral players, and chamber musicians as well as composers, singer-songwriters, and improvisers who bring a range of cultural influences to the group.

The Knights’ notable accomplishments include a 2017 Grammy Award nomination for a recording with violinist Gil Shaham; a performance at Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Rose Theater as part of the New York Philharmonic Biennial; a debut at Carnegie Hall in the New York premiere of Steven Stucky and Jeremy Denk’s opera *The Classical Style*; a US tour with banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck; a European tour with soprano Dawn Upshaw, including the group’s debut at Vienna’s Musikverein; a

debut at the Kennedy Center as part of the inaugural SHIFT: A Festival of American Orchestras; frequent festival appearances at Ravinia, Caramoor, Big Ears, and Tanglewood; and nine years of free summer performances at Central Park’s Naumburg Orchestral Concerts, Bryant Park, and BRIC’s Celebrate Brooklyn! Festival in Prospect Park.

In recent years, The Knights have collaborated and toured with world-renowned musicians including Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, Lise de la Salle, Joshua Redman, Silk Road virtuoso Siamak Aghaei, and pipa virtuoso Wu Man. The group has also collaborated with artists coming from a wide range of artistic disciplines including the Mark Morris Dance Group, visual artist Kevork Mourad, and Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Paul Muldoon. Their most recent album, *Azul*, featured the world-premiere recording of Osvaldo Golijov’s work *Azul* with soloist Yo-Yo Ma.

The first mandolin soloist to be nominated for a classical Grammy Award, **Avi Avital** is one of the foremost ambassadors for his instrument. Passionate and “explosively charismatic” (*New York Times*) in live performance, he is a driving force behind the reinvigoration of the mandolin repertory. More than 90 contemporary compositions, 15 of them concertos, have been written for him, while his inspired re-imaginings of music for other instruments include the arrangements heard on his 2015 ECHO Klassik Award-winning Deutsche Grammophon recording *Vivaldi*. Enhanced by his infectious spirit of adventure and the warm rapport he fosters with his audience, Mr. Avital’s path-breaking championship of his instrument is taking the mandolin center stage.

Mr. Avital's unprecedented Grammy nomination honored his recording of Avner Dorman's *Mandolin Concerto*, a work he commissioned in 2006 with New York's Metropolis Ensemble under Andrew Cyr. As the first mandolin soloist to become an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist, he has made three recordings for the label to date, including *Vivaldi*, a 2012 album featuring his own Bach concerto transcriptions; and *Between Worlds* in 2014, a cross-genre chamber collection exploring the nexus between classical and traditional music. He won his first ECHO Klassik Award for his 2008 collaboration on SONY Classical with the David Orlowsky Trio.

Recent performance highlights include Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts, London's Wigmore and Royal Albert Halls, the Berlin Philharmonie, Zurich's Tonhalle, Barcelona's Palau de la Música Catalana, the Paris Philharmonie, and, with a live telecast on Arte, the Palais de Versailles. In spring 2016, Mr. Avital undertook an international tour with a program of arrangements for mandolin, accordion, and percussion drawn primarily from *Between Worlds*.

Mr. Avital has partnered leading artists in a variety of genres, including Dawn Upshaw, Andreas Scholl, Juan Diego Flórez, Giora Feidman, Ray Chen, David Greilsammer, Mahan Esfahani, Richard Galliano and Ksenija Sidorova, Itamar Doari, and the Enso and Danish String Quartets, as well as a host of international orchestras from the Mahler Chamber Orchestra to the Israel Philharmonic. He is also a favorite on the international festival circuit, having appeared at the Aspen, Salzburg, Tanglewood, Spoleto, Ravenna, and Verbier festivals.

The winner of the first-prize Doris and Mori Arkin Award at Israel's prestigious

Aviv Competitions in 2007, Mr. Avital is the first mandolinist in the history of the competition to be so honored.

Hailed as a "virtuoso" and "intensely soulful" by the *New York Times*, "spellbinding" by the *New Yorker* and for his "incredibly rich sound" by the CBC, clarinetist **Kinan Azmeh's** utterly distinctive sound across a variety of musical genres is quickly gaining international recognition.

Born in Damascus, Syria, Mr. Azmeh was the first Arab to win the premier prize at the 1997 Nicolai Rubinstein International Competition in Moscow. He is a graduate of New York's Juilliard School as a student of Charles Neidich, and of both the Damascus High Institute of Music, where he studied with Shukry Sahwki, Nicolay Viovanof, and Anatoly Moratof; and Damascus University's School of Electrical Engineering. He earned his doctorate in music from the City University of New York in 2013.

Mr. Azmeh has appeared worldwide as a soloist, composer, and improviser. Notable appearances include Opera Bastille, Tchaikovsky Grand Hall, Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the UN General Assembly, Royal Albert Hall, Teatro Colon, der Philharmonie, the Library of Congress, Kennedy Center, the Mozarteum, and the Damascus Opera House for its opening concert in his native Syria.

As a soloist Mr. Azmeh has appeared with the Bavarian Radio Orchestra, West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, NDR Big-Band, Kiev Camerata, The Knights, the Izmir State Opera Orchestra, Corasara Orchestra, Osnabruck Symphony, Morgenland Festival Orchestra, Qatar Philharmonic, New Juilliard Ensemble, and the Syrian Symphony Orchestra. He has shared the stage with Yo-Yo Ma, Marcel Khalife, Aynur, Daniel Barenboim, Jivan Gasparian, Zakir Hussain,

Francois Rabbath, Simon Shaheen, Solhi-al-Wadi, Calefax Reed Quintet, and members of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

Mr. Azmeh's compositions include several solo, orchestra, and chamber music works as well as pieces for film, live illustration, and electronics. His discography comprises three albums with his ensemble Hewar, several soundtracks for film and dance, a duo album with pianist Dinuk Wijeratne, and a recent album with his New York Arabic/jazz quartet. He serves as artistic director of the Damascus Festival Chamber Music Ensemble, with whom he released an album of new contemporary Syrian chamber music written especially for the ensemble by various composers. He is also a frequent guest faculty at the Apple Hill Center for Chamber Music and is on the advisory board of the Nova Scotia Youth Orchestra. He is a member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble.

THE KNIGHTS

Colin Jacobsen and Eric Jacobsen / *Artistic Directors*

Violins

Colin Jacobsen
Guillaume Pirard
Christina Courtin
Emily Daggett Smith
Amie Weiss
Sally Koo

Violas

Miranda Sielaff
Mario Gotoh
Alissa Smith

Cellos

Caitlin Sullivan
Paul Wiancko

Bass

Shawn Conley

Flute

Alex Sopp

Percussion

Jeremy Smith

UMS ARCHIVES

UMS welcomes **The Knights** and **Avi Avital** as they make their UMS debuts this afternoon. This afternoon's performance marks **Kinan Azmeh**'s second appearance under UMS auspices, following his UMS debut in January 2009 in performances of his original composition *The Epic of Gilgamesh* with artist Kevork Mourad at the Biomedical Sciences Research Building Auditorium. This afternoon's performance marks **Colin Jacobsen**'s fifth UMS appearance, following his UMS debut in March 2009 with the Silk Road Ensemble and Yo-Yo Ma at Hill Auditorium. He most recently appeared at UMS in November 2013 at Rackham Auditorium with his quartet, Brooklyn Rider, and guest banjo soloist Béla Fleck.

THIS AFTERNOON'S VICTOR FOR UMS:



Ellie Serras

Supporter of this afternoon's performance by The Knights.

MAY WE ALSO RECOMMEND...

- 11/17–19 New York Philharmonic
- 12/8 Bach Collegium Japan
- 2/2 Gabriel Kahane's *Book of Travelers*

Tickets available at www.ums.org.

ON THE EDUCATION HORIZON...

- 11/16–19 New York Philharmonic Residency
Please visit ums.org/nyphil for a complete listing of activities.
- 11/18 UMS 101: New York Philharmonic Young People's Concert
(Pioneer High School, 601 W. Stadium Boulevard, 12 noon)
Paid registration required; please visit bit.ly/UMSClasses to register.
- 12/2 Pre-Show Talk: Musical Text Painting in Handel's *Messiah*
(Michigan League Henderson Room, 911 N. University Avenue,
6:00 pm)

Educational events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.