

# grateful

SEASON 18 2022 - 2023



Albert and Margaret Alkek Foundation

**IN CONCERT** SERIES

# *f*amily

Saturday, September 24, 2022 • 5:00pm

The Church of St. John the Divine

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**IN CONCERT SERIES**

LIVE  
STREAM

*f*amily

Saturday, September 24, 2022 • 5:00pm  
Live from The Church of St. John the Divine

**Mei-Ann Chen**, *Conductor*

**Michael Abels**, *Composer*

**Mak Grgic** (GUR-gitch), *Guitar Soloist*

**Miya Shay**, *Master of Ceremonies*

**Juan Pablo Contreras** (Khan-TRE-ras)

*Mariachitlán*

-----17 minutes-----

**Mariachi Imperial de America**

-----10 minutes-----

**Bèo dạt mây trôi**

Vietnamese Bac Ninh folk song -- Arr. by *Ngo Hoang Quan*

-----5 minutes-----

**Michael Abels** (AY-buls)

*Borders*

Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra

I. Austere, melancholy • II. Lively

-----15 minutes-----

ROCO WORLD PREMIERE COMMISSION

**Ludwig van Beethoven** (BAY-toh-vun)

.....Symphony No. 5

I. Allegro con brio • II. Andante con moto

III. Scherzo: Allegro • IV. Allegro – Presto

-----30 minutes-----



For more information on **Matt's Musings**, see page 11.

This evening's program is listed in concert order, plus possible surprises,  
and should last approximately 90 minutes.

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Chair

**Gavin Reed**  
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Beverly & Bill Coit  
Chair

**Horn**

**Nathan Williams**  
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Jeanie Flowers  
Chair  
(in loving memory of Dan  
Flowers)

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**Clarinet**

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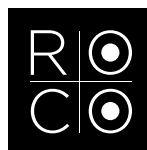
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Benjamin Holloway  
Chair

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Clare Glassell  
Chair

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**Trumpet**

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\* ROCO guest musicians



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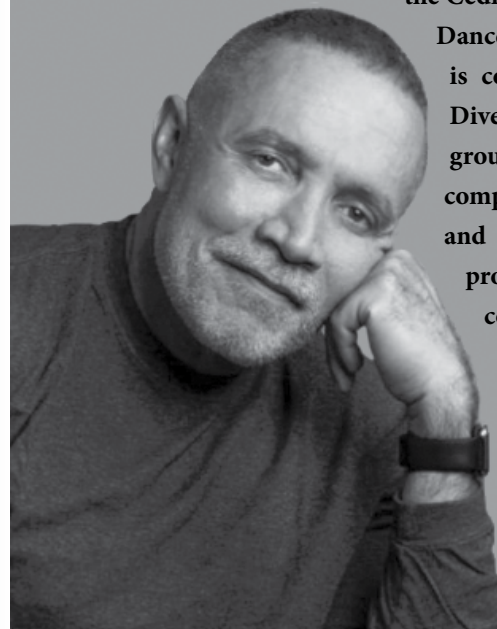
Praised for her dynamic, passionate conducting style, Taiwanese American conductor Mei-Ann Chen is acclaimed for infusing orchestras with energy, enthusiasm and high-level music-making, galvanizing audiences and communities alike. Music Director of the MacArthur Award-winning Chicago Sinfonietta since 2011, Ms. Chen has been named Chief Conductor of Austria's Recreation Grosses Orchester Graz at Styriarte beginning fall 2021 after two seasons as the orchestra's first-ever Principal Guest Conductor, making her the first female Asian conductor to hold this position with an Austrian orchestra. Since September 2019, she also serves as the first-ever Artistic Partner of Houston's ROCO (River Oaks Chamber Orchestra). Ms. Chen also has served as Artistic Director & Conductor for the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra Summer Festival since 2016.

Highly regarded as a compelling communicator and an innovative leader both on and off the podium, and a sought-after guest conductor, she has appeared with distinguished orchestras throughout the Americas, Europe, Taiwan, The United Kingdom, and Scandinavia, and continues to expand her relationships with orchestras worldwide (over 110 orchestras to date). Honors include being named one of the 2015 Top 30 Influencers by Musical America; the 2012 Helen M. Thompson Award from the League of American Orchestras; Winner, the 2007 Taki Concordia Fellowship founded by Marin Alsop; and 2005 First Prize Winner of the Malko Competition (she remains as the only woman in the competition history since 1965 to have won First Prize), and ASCAP awards for innovative programming.

## **Michael Abels,** *Commissioned Composer*

Michael Abels is best-known for his scores for the Oscar-winning film *GET OUT*, and for Jordan Peele's *US*, for which Abels won the World Soundtrack Award, the Jerry Goldsmith Award, a Critics Choice nomination, an Image Award nomination, and multiple critics awards. The hip-hop influenced score for *US* was short-listed for the Oscar, and was even named "Score of the Decade" by online publication *The Wrap*. As a concert composer, Abels has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Meet The Composer, and the Sphinx Organization, among others. His orchestral works have been performed by the Chicago Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Atlanta Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and many more. As guest conductor of *GET OUT IN CONCERT*, Abels has led orchestras like the National Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony. Several of his orchestral works have been recorded by the Chicago Sinfonietta on

the Cedille label, including *Delights & Dances* and *Global Warming*. Abels is co-founder of the Composers Diversity Collective, an advocacy group to increase visibility of composers of color in film, game and streaming media. Upcoming projects include the ballet for concert band *FALLING SKY* for Butler University, *AT WAR WITH OURSELVES* for the Kronos Quartet, and the Hugh Jackman film *BAD EDUCATION* for HBO.





## Mak Grgic, Guitar Soloist

Touted as a “gifted young guitarist” by the New York Times, and “a guitarist to keep an eye on” by the Washington Post, Mak Grgic is emerging as a star on the worldwide stage.

An expansive and adventurous repertoire attests to his versatility and wide-ranging interests: from the Baroque and Renaissance to music of the cinema; from ethnic music of his native Balkans to extreme avant-garde and microtonal music, Mak’s extraordinary talents and tastes as soloist, collaborator, and recording artist are fueled by his curiosity, imagination, and boundless energy.

As a concert artist, he averages eighty-five performances a year — nearly two bookings per week — as both soloist and collaborator. He is a founding member and active performer in two duos—the Flamenco-style “Duo Deloro” with Adam Del Monte, and the new music-focused “FretX Duo” with Daniel Lippel, guitarist of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE). As Young Artist in Residence with the Da Camera Society of Los Angeles, he founded “DC8,” an octet declared “an inspiring addition to the contemporary music landscape in Los Angeles” by the Los Angeles Times.

Other ongoing collaborations include the JACK Quartet, Martin Chalifour (concertmaster, LA Philharmonic), cellists Jay Campbell and Joshua Roman, The Assad Brothers, and John Sant’Ambrogio (St. Louis Symphony).



## Mariachi Imperial de America

Mariachi Imperial de America has been in existence for over 30 years. Founded by the Longoria family patriarch in Houston, Texas; Mariachi Imperial de America arose from humble beginnings, mostly performing at private parties and other local venues across Houston. Today, Mariachi Imperial de America is recognized for its energy infused performances and ability to interpret songs in other languages including Mandarin, Armenian, and English. Its diverse musical repertoire distinguishes Mariachi Imperial de America from other mariachi groups. Performances are filled with dancing, singing, and often include audience participation. If you listen closely you will hear musical influences from various genres of Latin music and traditional mariachi music. Performances often include theatrical imitations of artists like Juan Gabriel, Jose Alfredo Jimenez, and Vicente Fernandez.

Locally, Mariachi Imperial has achieved great success, thanks to its members and loyal supporters. Among its accolades and recognitions, Mariachi Imperial received:

- Recognized as the #1 Mariachi in Houston by *The Houston Press Magazine* in 2005
- First place at the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza by Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan
- First place at the Houston Live Stock Show and Rodeo Mariachi Competition

...continued

Nationally, Imperial de America has also been featured on Good Morning America, the Selena Vive concert, UFC, Mis Quince, and Jersylicious. Imperial de America has accompanied world renowned artists like: Beatriz Adriana, Pepe Aguilar, Bronco, Elsa Garcia, Grupo Mazz, Maribel Guardia, Lorena Herrera, Pablo Montero, Patricia Navidad, Bobby Pulido, Roberto Pulido, Nydia Rojas, Federicico Villa, and many others.

Abroad, Mariachi Imperial de America has had the opportunity to perform for:

- Mexican Embassy in Beijing, China
- U.S. Embassy in Armenia, Albania, and Macedonia
- Mariachi Festival in Vancouver, Canada

Under the direction of Jose Longoria, the group has recorded three albums. Que Bonita Musica, their most recent album, includes recordings of original songs; and popular songs in English, Mandarin, Armenian, and Hindi. It's precisely this interest in diverse styles of music and a passion for traditional mariachi music that has allowed Imperial de America to reach a wide audience.

Mariachi Imperial de America is composed of both family and friends. The Longoria family boasts four generations of Mariachi musicians, and two generations are currently represented in the band.

## ROCO TEAM

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Download **ROCO's app** to access a digital program and stay up to date with all our programs and events



**Matt's MUSINGS**

Scan the code to access **Matt's Musings** at the start of the Beethoven piece and enjoy the comically informative commentary written by ROCO's Principal Percussionist, **Matt McClung**, to read along with the performance





## Juan Pablo Contreras *Mariachitlán*

■ **Quick Intro:** Written in 2016 and premiered in Guadalajara; this version for chamber orchestra was commissioned by the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and premiered in June 2021.

■ **Sobre el mariachi:** By now most of us probably feel like we have at least a light grasp on mariachi as a genre, but as an art form its roots are deep and its varieties extensive – and what’s more, it provides a cultural touchstone for millions of people. Mariachi exhibits traits of both indigenous Central American music and that of the Spanish colonizers, and today’s modern incarnation traces its roots to the state of Jalisco.

■ **About this piece:** Contreras writes, “*Mariachitlán (Mariachiland)* ... recounts my experience visiting the Plaza de los Mariachis in Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco, a place where mariachis play their songs in every corner and interrupt each other to win over the crowd.... Near the end of the piece, a policeman blows his whistle in an attempt to stop the party. However, the crowd chants *Mariachitlán*, gradually increasing in intensity, and is rewarded with more vibrant music that ends the work with great brilliance.”

■ **Further listening:** There is a wealth of music inspired by Latin American cultural traditions. Narrowing it down to music inspired by mariachi styles: Blas Galindo, *Sones de Mariachi*; Jose Pablo Moncayo: *Huapango*; Robert X. Rodriguez, *Sinfonia à la Mariachi*.



## Ngo Hoang Quan

### *Bèo dạt mây trôi*

■ **Quick Intro:** Arrangement of a Vietnamese folk song attributed to the northern province of Bắc Ninh. This orchestration was revised for ROCO by Jason Stephens.

■ **Folk influence:** The song title translates, “Drifting Blossoms, Floating Clouds.” The lyrics paint a picture familiar to anyone who has heard folk music from any tradition, anywhere: a girl sits alone through the night, waiting for her love to return. Clouds drift by, birds soar above, the moon “tilts its head.” And throughout the song, the lonely refrain: “Do people far away remember for whom they sit and wait?”

■ **Scoring notes:** Quan keeps things interesting by mixing up the scoring. After a brass chorale, the strings enter, and finally a solo oboe presents the theme over a pulsing string figure. As the melody progresses, it is handed off to other solo winds before the violins take up the theme.

■ **Further listening:** Two Vietnamese composers are doing great work and building global profiles. Vân Anh (Vanessa) Võ is a composer/performer whose works have been championed by the Kronos Quartet, and Viet Cuong is composer-in-residence at St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Both write music that is certainly rewarding and worth exploring.

# ROCOCO Thanks You!

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At the risk of sounding cheesy, you complete us! As much as music needs us to perform, we equally need you to hear and receive. We are so grateful for your connecting with us and for your support and enthusiasm for all things ROCO. Here is to the weaving of our musical pattern through Houston and the world.





**Michael Abels**  
*Borders*

■ **Quick Intro:** A concerto for guitar and orchestra, commissioned by ROCO and Quad City Symphony Orchestra (Iowa) for guitarist Mak Grgić. This is the world premiere.

■ **About the composer:** Michael Abels' most-heard works are his scores to the Jordan Peele films *Get Out*, *Us*, and *Nope*. He collaborated with Rhiannon Giddens on *Omar*, an opera exploring the life of Omar ibn Said. His music blends elements of jazz, blues, and other popular styles with traditional classical forms.

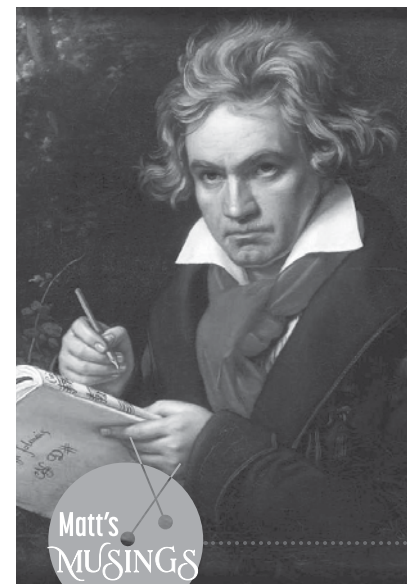
■ **About the piece:** Abels writes, "This piece is inspired by the museum exhibit 'Sahara: Acts of Memory' depicting life camp 'Sahara' that was created in Denmark for housing refugees of the Bosnian War in the 1990s. Among the refugees was graphic artist Ismet Berbic and his family. The exhibit details the Berbics' struggle to preserve individuality, family and cultural identity in the face of losing country and community. Guitarist Mak Grgić was a friend of the Berbics, and experienced the Balkan War firsthand as a child. In the first movement of this concerto, the guitar is a protagonist that is repeatedly confined by sonic bars or walls created by the orchestra. The second movement depicts a child running, sometimes joyfully, but also sometimes in fear."

■ **Further listening:** Do a deep dive into Abels' shifting stylistic landscape, with pieces like *Global Warming*, *Delights and Dances* for string quartet and orchestra (and available in ROCO's Listening Room), and the solo piano piece *Iconoclasm (For Lenny)*.

*Ludwig van Beethoven*

## **Ludwig van Beethoven** *Symphony 5*

■ **Quick Intro:** Written 1804-08 and premiered on a marathon concert at Theater an der Wien in Vienna. Also on the program: the Sixth Symphony, three movements of the C major Mass, the *Choral Fantasy* for solo, piano, choir, and orchestra, the Fourth Piano Concerto and a piano improvisation, and a 15-minute concert aria. The concert lasted *four hours*.



Matt's  
MUSINGS

■ **Beyond the Music:** Overactive imaginations of nineteenth-century listeners led people to attach all sorts of non-musical associations to pieces of music. For instance, the appellation "Moonlight" is a bit tenuous in its description of the C-sharp minor sonata. It was Beethoven's secretary and biographer Anton Schindler who claimed that Beethoven himself referred to the famous opening motif of this 5th Symphony as the "Knock of Fate," quoting him, "This is the sound of Fate knocking at the door." The composer's student, pianist Carl Czerny, alleged that his teacher told him the motif came from an overheard bird song. Some musicologists have even pointed to Beethoven's significant gastrointestinal troubles, suggesting that the four notes might actually derive from... well, let's say "a rumbling gut" since we're in polite company here.

■ **V' for Victory:** In an interesting twist of – ahem – fate, the letter 'V' in Morse Code is the same rhythm as that opening motif short-short-short-long. During the Second World War, some radio stations would transmit this 'V' at the top of broadcasts as subtle encouragement for listeners in the know.

■ **Futher listening:** Let's have fun with this one. Walter Murphy released his disco arrangement, called *A Fifth of Beethoven*; if you've never heard it, it's time to rectify that. And definitely look up PDQ Bach's *New Horizons in Music Appreciation*, which presents the opening movement with narration by sportscasters.



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**re•sound:**

*verb*, 1. fill a place with sound; be loud enough to echo

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**re•sound:**

*verb*, 2. sing the praises of

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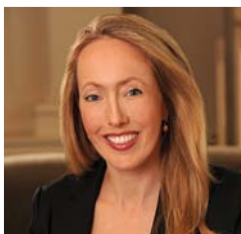
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