

THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC
VASSAR COLLEGE

NY Connections

Music by Jonathan Chenette

**A celebration to honor his retirement, dedication,
and service to Vassar College**

Be Here Now (premiere)

Serenity

Elegy and Affirmation

Comets (public premiere)

Raman Ramakrishnan, cello

Thomas Sauer, *piano*

Jacquelyn Matava '09, *mezzo-soprano*

Samuel Gaskin, *piano*

And the *Be Here Now* ensemble of faculty and guest artists

Eduardo Navega, *conductor*

A Dickinson-Kayden Event

Saturday, September 7, 2024 · 3:00 PM
Skinner Recital Hall

PROGRAM

Welcome | Kathryn L. Libin

Professor of Music on the Mary Conover Mellon Chair



Be Here Now (2024, premiere) Jonathan Chenette (b. 1954)

Marka Young, Rachel Handman, *violin*, Liuh-Wen Ting, *viola*,
Jacob Nordlinger, *cello*, Daniel Merriman, *double bass*,
Susan Rotholz, *flute*, Cheryl Bishkoff, *oboe*, Ian Tyson, *clarinet*,
Peter Reit, *French horn*, Elisabeth Romano, *bassoon*
Eduardo Navega, *conductor*



Serenity (2021)

Thomas Sauer, *piano*

Elegy and Affirmation (2002)

Raman Ramakrishnan, *cello*
Mr. Sauer, *piano*

Intermission

Comets (2021, public premiere)

Jonathan Chenette

Texts by Carole Simmons Oles – *Night Watches: Inventions on the Life of Maria Mitchell* (Alice James Books, 1985). Used with permission.

1. Miss Mitchell's Comet
2. Maria's Ghost Considers the Reappearance of Halley's Comet in 1985
3. Observing Halley's Comet, 1835
4. Maria Mitchell in the Great Beyond With Marilyn Monroe
5. The Total Eclipse of the Sun
6. Maria's Ghost Contemplates Her Preservers

Jacquelyn Matava '09, *mezzo-soprano*
Samuel Gaskin, *piano*



Please silence all cell phones or other personal electronic devices and refrain from texting. Use of these instruments will disturb other audience members and cause interference with in-house recording and webcasting.

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NOTES

Be Here Now (composed 2024 & premiered today; duration 14 minutes)

This work mixes winds and strings and requires a conductor, making the ensemble a mini-orchestra. Like one of the best-known 10-instrument compositions – Benjamin Britten’s opus 1 *Sinfonietta* – *Be Here Now* employs standard wind quintet and string quartet plus double bass.

Inspired by sonic imagery found, surprisingly, in a hiking guidebook, the music begins with different groups of hikers setting out at slow but steady and then double-time paces. Soon, instrument groups associate with components of the natural environment: wind instruments with rocks, for instance, and strings with trees. The music responds to guidebook author Edward Henry’s evocations of bellowing boulders, bold staccato rocks, muted forests, lifting melodies, spreading counter-melodies, and harmonizing ridges along the path to a rock promontory in New York’s Shawangunk Mountains known as Gertrude’s Nose. “The crescendos of rock continue to grow, and the forest interludes fade into the background as the land builds to a climax”, culminating in what Henry calls the “final stanza” from the “natural orchestra” (*Gunks Trails*, 2003).

As for the title of *Be Here Now*, it comes from a hand-painted sign of mysterious origin greeting hikers near the start of a path to a wilderness area near Santa Fe, New Mexico. Its advice to “be here now” is as germane to music listeners as to hikers. Forego the distractions of modern life and be fully present in this place and this moment. Happy hiking!

Serenity (composed 2021 & premiered 2023; duration 15 minutes)

Serenity draws inspiration from a quiet dawn at Lake Lila in NY’s Adirondacks. An opening peaceful tune harmonized sweetly undergoes a range of melodic and harmonic transformations. Rhythms derive entirely from quarter-note values or their multiples, with a few grace notes and rolls needed for wide-spanning chords. Contrapuntal techniques of canon (imitating the tune with time delays among multiple parts), inversion (turning the tune upside-down), and augmentation (lengthening the tune’s notes by a consistent proportion or amount) delineate one extended section. After a peak of harmonic richness and volume, varied forms of the tune lead to a thrice-repeated distillation of its opening and closing parts. The tune then returns intact followed by a short and quiet coda.

Elegy and Affirmation (composed & premiered 2002; duration 15 minutes)

Elegy and Affirmation was commissioned for premiere at the Blanden Memorial Art Museum in Fort Dodge, Iowa as part of a memorial event marking the first anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Its elegiac first movement and hopeful second movement derive inspiration from diverse sources: a conversation with the mother of a victim of the World Trade Center collapse, Annie Nelson (thus the quote from Stephen Foster's "Gentle Annie" which serves as the culmination of *Elegy*), a song sung by Afghan girls returning to school which dominates *Affirmation*, melodies borrowed from repertoires of various Asian bowed-string instruments, and a poem by W.H. Auden. The piece seeks both to mourn our loss and to assert our interconnectedness in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

Comets (composed 2021 & public premiere today; prior performance at 2022 Vassar College Alumnae/i Reunion; duration 27 minutes)

Music for mezzo-soprano and piano based on texts by Carole Oles from her collection *Night Watches: Inventions on the Life of Maria Mitchell*

Comets is a cycle of six songs drawing on the poetic imagination of Carole Oles, reflecting on the legacy of 19th-century astronomer Maria Mitchell. Three of the songs use poems from Oles's 1985 collection grounded deeply in and drawing closely from Mitchell's journals and diaries – about her famous discovery of a telescopic comet in 1847 at the age of 29 (#1), her observation (with her amateur astronomer father) of Halley's Comet in 1835 (#3), and her account of a total eclipse of the sun, for which she traveled to Burlington, Iowa along the Mississippi River in 1869 to observe and measure the event with her female students from Vassar College (#5). The other three songs draw on Oles's poetic imaginings of a posthumous Maria Mitchell in 1985 encountering Halley's Comet again with the scientific tools and theories and fears of this later era (#2), contemplating three women with PhDs working in 1985 to conserve her legacy (#6), and exchanging thoughts with movie star and pop culture icon Marilyn Monroe, born Norma Jeane Mortenson (#4).

The music for the songs is eclectic and responsive to the texts. Wide-ranging piano arpeggios evoke Mitchell sweeping her telescope

across the skies (#1). Propulsive rhythms reinforce fears of human-created environmental calamities (#2). A dreamy reverie expresses the wonder of seeing Halley's Comet (#3). Jazzy interludes fit the interjections of Marilyn Monroe (#4). Breathless anticipation of a total eclipse contrasts with lyrical evocation of the eclipse experience (#5). Paeans of praise and blessing honor three modern-day women preserving Mitchell's legacy (#6).

Comets, the song cycle, emerged during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-21. The overwrought treatment of the phrase "keep you from the latest flu" in the final song owes something to this origin.



BIOGRAPHIES



Jonathan Chenette's compositions have received performances on the ISCM World Music Days in Amsterdam, at the World Harp Congress in Vienna, and on an NPR national broadcast. His music appears in publications by Boosey & Hawkes, Theodore Presser, and Fish Creek Music and in recordings on the Innova, Riverrun, Fleur de Son Classics, Capstone, and Parma/Navona labels. A graduate of the University of Chicago with a Ph.D. in music composition and a bachelor's degree in

mathematics, he also holds a master's degree in music composition from Butler University. He is a professor emeritus of music at Vassar College, where he was previously Dean of the Faculty and Acting (2013) and Interim (2016-17) President. Prior to 2008, he served on the faculty at Grinnell College for twenty-five years and as Associate Dean at the end of that period.





Pianist and organist Samuel Gaskin has created music with mezzo-soprano Jacquelyn Matava since 2018. Their most recent collaborative program is “Sacred Song,” an ecumenical mélange of Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist music.

Samuel received a 2022-23 Fulbright study grant, completing two Artist Diplomas at the Conservatoire à rayonnement régional de Versailles: in organ with Jean-Baptiste Robin; in jazz piano with Damien Argentieri. Samuel is currently based in France, where he is professor of classical and jazz piano at the Ecole de musique in Le Chesnay-Rocquencourt and organist at the American Church in Paris (7^e arrondissement).



Winner of *The American Prize* for Women in Art Song (2023), American mezzo-soprano Jacquelyn Matava commands the stage with a voice that seamlessly traverses the opera, oratorio, and art song genres. Her versatility in opera is showcased in roles such as Nelda in Kamala Sankaram’s *Taking Up Serpents* at The Glimmerglass Festival and Zita in *Gianni Schicchi* at Festival Napa Valley with Kent Nagano conducting. As a concert soloist, Jacquelyn has been heard in performances of Bach’s *Mass in B minor*, Duruflé’s *Requiem*, Handel’s *Messiah*, Mozart’s *Great Mass in C minor*, and Stravinsky’s *Les Noces*. She has sung with the Tanglewood Music Center, Lucerne Festival Academy, Glimmerglass Festival, Opera Saratoga, Crested Butte Music Festival, Opera San Antonio, Alamo City Opera, Cincinnati Song Initiative, Victoria Bach Festival, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, and Hudson Valley BachFest. A native of Farmington, Connecticut, Jacquelyn earned D.M. and M.M. degrees in vocal performance from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music and a B.A. in music and economics from Vassar College. She currently serves as Associate Professor of Music at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, and teaches on the voice faculty at the Boston University Tanglewood Institute in Lenox, MA.



Eduardo Navega received his undergraduate musical education from the State University of Campinas (Brazil), with postgraduate degrees from the University of Sheffield (England) and the Hartt School of Music, Hartford, CT (USA).

Mr. Navega was violist and Assistant Conductor of the Campinas Symphony Orchestra (Brazil). He was also the principal conductor of the Symphony Orchestra at the State University of Campinas 1991 to 1997. In 1995 Mr. Navega was

awarded the APCA prize, a prestigious critics association in the State of Sao Paulo, Brazil. During his graduate work in England, Eduardo conducted the University of Sheffield Chamber Orchestra and received public and critical acclaim for his performances.

A sought after conducting teacher, Mr. Navega has held teaching positions at the State University of Campinas, The Conductors Institute at Bard College, and Vassar College. He has also conducted orchestras in South America, the US, the UK and Bulgaria. He has been Director of Orchestral Activities and conductor of the Vassar College Orchestra since 1999.



Cellist **Raman Ramakrishnan** enjoys performing chamber music, old and new, around the world. For two decades, as a founding member of the Horszowski Trio and the Daedalus Quartet, he toured extensively through North and South America, Europe, and Asia, and recorded for Bridge Records

and Avie Records. Mr. Ramakrishnan is currently a member of the Boston Chamber Music Society and is on the faculty of the Bard College Conservatory of Music. In the summers, he has performed at the Marlboro, Vail, Portland, and Kingston Chamber Music festivals and served on the faculties of the Kneisel Hall and Norfolk Chamber Music Festivals.



Pianist **Thomas Sauer** performs regularly as soloist, chamber musician, and recital partner. Some recent appearances include recitals at Mannes and Simon's Rock Colleges, Merkin Concert Hall, and Rockefeller University. With his long-time duo partner Colin Carr, Mr. Sauer has appeared at the Wigmore Hall (London), the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Bargemusic (New York City), and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Boston). Other duo recitals include violinists Midori (Berlin Philharmonie and the Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels) and Jennifer Koh (Kennedy Center, Kimmel Center, Princeton

University). Among Mr. Sauer's numerous chamber music appearances are performances at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. He has performed at many of the leading festivals in the United States, including Marlboro, Caramoor, Music@Menlo, and Chamber Music Northwest. He has premiered works by Robert Cuckson, Sebastian Currier, Donald Martino, Harold Meltzer, Ruth Schonthal, Nathan Shields, Suzanne Sorkin, and Richard Wilson, among many others.



Maria Mitchell, one of the first professors hired for the nascent Vassar College, was sought by Matthew Vassar to lend luster to Vassar's nine-member faculty. Mitchell (1818–1889) had already gained a world reputation in astronomy when, while "sweeping" the skies of Nantucket with a telescope in 1847, she discovered and reported a "telescopic" comet, one too distant to be seen with the naked eye. The comet was subsequently named for her, and for her discovery she was awarded a gold medal by the

King of Denmark, who had offered a prize for such first identifications of telescopic comets.

One of ten children born into the Nantucket Island Quaker household of William Mitchell, an accomplished amateur astronomer and a colleague of William Cranch Bond, the first director of the Harvard College Observatory, she pursued astronomical and mathematical studies with her father. In light of her accomplishment, she became the first woman elected into membership, in 1848, of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and, in 1850, of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. (Text from the *Vassar Encyclopedia*.)



Carole Simmons Oles is the author of nine poetry collections, including *Waking Stone: Inventions on the Life of Harriet Hosmer* (University of Arkansas Press), *The Deed* (Louisiana State University Press), and *A Selected History of Her Heart* (University of New Mexico Press.) Her poems have appeared in magazines such as *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *The Women's*

Review of Books; they appear in anthologies including *Poems for a Small Planet*, *The Ploughshares Poetry Reader*, and *Heart of the Order: Baseball Poems*. Her essays have appeared in *Field*, *Telling the Barn Swallow*, *Touchstones*, and other magazines and anthologies. Born in New York City, she has taught in Massachusetts, Virginia, and California and at Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and Bread Loaf School of English in Vermont. She is currently Professor Emerita at California State University, Chico.

TEXTS

Texts for *Comets*, poems by Carole Oles from her *Night Watches*

1. MISS MITCHELL'S COMET

October 1, 1847, 10:30. Finally the cover has lifted. That cannot be mist at 5 degrees above Polaris, where late as Tuesday nothing was. Does sight betray? Stay calm. If it be sent

to test, take the test then. No
nebula could have held that place unnoticed
all year. I swept over and over
the quadrant. Was I a sentry
whose watching grew remiss,
the nebula slipping past my sight?
Take notes, hand. After, let head postulate
this seeming comet, new word on the slate of sky.

2. MARIA'S GHOST CONSIDERS THE REAPPEARANCE OF HALLEY'S COMET IN 1985

So far beyond the farthest nil
inside my coma
I want my voice back
I want to orbit in

and point the IRAS
toward new comets
almost too many
for our alphabet to name

and read your cameras
with electric sensors tracking, testing
Dr. Whipple's dirty snowball model

Already two long lifetimes
since we marked this comet
swing above our upturned isle
Then I felt no augury

In 1985 I fear
not what the comet brings not
heated gas or dust
but what humanity would bring itself

a winter more cold than faded stars
the planet without green
no eyes to search the dark

This same animal leaves footprints on the moon!

You, there — keep watch

I see, I only see

3. OBSERVING HALLEY'S COMET, 1835

Tonight we know that we must look up.
You tamed the errant bodies
by predicting this one,
tracing it to 240 B.C.

Another art: not to see what is not.

The ancients believed comets
brought famine, plague, and war.
Historian Josephus blamed
your comet for Jerusalem's fall.
Observers claimed that it
foretold the Battle of Hastings
and the death of Hal.

Now faint, faint, scarcely
in the transit, the glowing
horsetail streams across the sky . . .
Father and I may be the first
to see it on these shores . . .

What prophecy tonight? The comet
cries *Design* to comfort us
though this sighting be
our one life's time.
What shall I fear? I am 17

and pray to use my open eyes.

4. MARIA MITCHELL IN THE GREAT BEYOND WITH MARILYN MONROE

What would my life have been with your face?
Once someone said I had good eyes. Mostly
on canvas, in photographs, I half turned away.
The camera, they say, was your most faithful lover.

No one ever told me I was pretty when I was
a little girl. All little girls should be told
they're pretty, even if they aren't.

Little girls should hear the truth.
No one could make a beauty of me, I knew.
And Quaker Discipline decreed: "Be not conformed
to this world, but be ye transformed
by the renewing of your mind."
A child in my closet-size study, I hung a sign---
Maria is busy. Do not knock.

When I was 8 my foster family made me wash
every dish for 5 cents a month.

Dear child, how could fame repair such loss,
your mother's mind broken like her parents'
and brother's before. Though a woman, I
faltered when Mother's mind cast off from me.

The same year, at the boardinghouse the nice
man showed me a game, and when

I saw! They disbelieved, and you began to stammer.
What man on earth isn't selfish?
My sister died thankful never to have been naked
before her husband. I never married.
Come walk with me. Smell the ocean
and pick daphne, grapes, heart's ease.

Do you know how I got here? Three days before
at a party I wrote in the guest book
under Residence, *Nowhere*.

And now you live everywhere at once
whose ambition was to be men's earthly star.
Here are stars you can trust:
Sirius, Canopus, Arcturus, Vega, Capella,
Betelgeuse, Altair, Aldebaran.
Say these, Norma Jeane.
We are women learning together.

5. THE TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE SUN

Burlington, Iowa

August 7, 1869

We wait, we scarcely breathe,
the moon is not on time, then all at once

an ink begins to spill upon
the limb of sun and as it spreads
narrowing the golden curve of light
as it breaks to brilliant lines
and points, the total phase draws near

thin clouds have drifted
toward the sun, the Mississippi goes leaden
and a sickly green washes over the land

Venus shines on one side of the sun,
Mercury the other; Arcturus overhead
and Saturn rising in the East

the cattle low, birds cry painfully,
fireflies start up in the leaves
and when the last light quenches
a wave of voices lifts from villages below
the corona bursts forth
encircling the sun, streamers
unroll for millions of miles in space

two prominences glow on the right
of the burning disk, a twentieth
of the moon's diameter, and shaped
like half-blown morning glories
pink and white, with violet intermingling

the moon moves on, billowy forms arising
near its vertex shift within themselves,
a flicker at the moon's center and
another flower rushes out

to bloom the sun . . .

No wonder there are sun-worshippers!

6. MARIA'S GHOST CONTEMPLATES HER PRESERVERS

The longer I live
the more I value the love
of my own sex, neither vain
nor fawning

Dr. Emilia Belserene –
beautiful brightness it means –
director of the observatory in my name
praise you on the narrow winding stairway to the dome
and at the 5-inch telescope, gift of the "Women of America"
bless you

Dr. Jane Stroup, guardian
of my papers, shielding the glass cases with muslin
so our photographs won't disappear
praise you who let a stranger use the copier
who polishes my Dolland telescope that tracked the comet
praise you

Dr. Louise Hussey
keeper of Nantucket's oldest stories
I read on winter days till I was full
may the inner vault maintain its temperature control
the words on parchment fix
praise your steps from desk to stacks
bless you
bless your cane, and bless your ancient auto
bless you at the wheel, and keep you from the latest flu

Dear women my preservers
the world is so broad
I reach at every nerve
to pull the curtain aside

Skinner Hall of Music · Upcoming Events

Most concerts are free and open to the public | no reservations are required
Skinner Hall doors open 30 minutes before the performance

Sun., 9/15 · 3:00 PM - **Interplay: Original works for trio and American Songbook.** Nick Hetko, *piano*, Rich Syracuse, *double bass*, and Jeff "Siege" Siegel, *drums*.

Sat., 10/5 · 8:00 PM - **Vassar College Orchestra.**
Eduardo Navega, *conductor*.

Sun., 10/6 · 3:00 PM - **In C.** This program explores the idea of a musical key, with music by JS Bach, Haydn, Beethoven, Chopin, Unsuk Chin, Suzanne Sorkin, and Péter Wolf. Thomas Sauer, *piano*.

Fri., 11/1 · 8:00 PM - **From Land to Sea: Musical impressions for harp trio.** Chelsea Lane *harp*, Ginevra Petrucci *flute*, Maren Rothfritz *viola*.

Sat., 11/2 · 8:00 PM - **Plucked Strings.** A different take on the music for harpsichord, with guitar and violin. The program includes music by Bach, Martinû, Milhaud, Wilson, and others. Marija Ilić, *harpsichord*, Roberto Granados, *guitar*, Anna Elashvili, *violin*.

Thur., 11/7* · 7:00 PM - **Obair nam Ban: Guthan na Gàidhealtachd / Women's Work: Voices of the Highlands.** James Ruff, *Tenor & Early Gaelic Harp*
*Note Location: Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center

Sat., 11/9 · 8:00 PM - **Vassar College Treble Chorus.**
Susan Bialek, *conductor*.

Sun., 11/10 · 3:00 PM - **Vassar College & Community Wind Ensemble.**
James Osborn, *conductor*.



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