

American Composers Orchestra Announces 2020-2021 Season Updates

Derek Bermel, Artistic Director & George Manahan, Music Director

**Connecting ACO Community Vol. 3 Continues with Virtual World Premieres of New Commissions
Streaming Live on August 23, August 30, September 13, and October 4 at 5pm**

**Professional Development Seminars for Emerging Composers and Composer-to-Composer
Conversations Launch Online in September 2020**

**ACO and Jennifer Koh at Carnegie Hall | Tuesday, April 20, 2021 at 7:30pm
World Premiere by 2019 ACO Underwood New Music Readings Winner Carlos Bandera
Plus the New York Premieres of Two Violin Concertos for Jennifer Koh
by Lisa Bielawa and Christopher Cerrone**

*An Evening of Sound, Voice, Poetry and Healing | Late Spring 2021
Co-Presented by ACO and the Apollo Theater*

**Featuring Music by Joel Thompson, Carlos Simon, and Tania León
Evening Co-curated and Directed by Jonathan McCrory in Partnership with National Black Theatre**

30th ACO EarShot New Music Readings in New York City | June 17 and 18, 2021

**ACO's Pathways Pilot Program supported by League of American Orchestra's Futures Fund Launches
in 2020-2021 with First Pilot Fellow Anjna Swaminathan**

ACO Commission Club Continues with Composer Lisa Bielawa

www.americancomposers.org

New York, NY – **American Composers Orchestra (ACO)** announces a slate of virtual and in-person programming for the 2020-2021 season in response to these challenging times for the performing arts. Under the leadership of Artistic Director **Derek Bermel**, Music Director **George Manahan**, and President **Edward Yim**, ACO confirms its commitment this season to the creation, performance, preservation, and promotion of music by American composers with programming that sparks curiosity and reflects geographic, stylistic, racial, and gender diversity.

“At this time of great uncertainty but unlimited potential, ACO continues to champion the music of our time,” says Edward Yim. “This season features premiere performances and readings that offer our audience a chance to share in the excitement, reflection, and catharsis of this modern age of anxiety and – hopefully – positive transformation.”

ACO's ongoing online programming includes **Connecting ACO Community**, a commissioning initiative created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Between April 2020 and October 2020, ACO has commissioned 19 new works premiered online on Sundays at 5pm for a ticketed audience on ACO's YouTube channel. Each session includes a world premiere performance, along with a live conversation with the featured

composer and performer(s), hosted by Derek Bermel or Edward Yim. Composers who have been commissioned include Ethan Iverson, Shara Nova, Vicente Hansen Atria, Sakari Dixon Vanderveer, Gity Razaz, and more. Four remaining premieres are scheduled on the following Sundays at 5pm: August 23, August 30, September 13, and October 4, 2020.

In addition, ACO will launch two new offerings in September 2020. **Professional Development Webinars**, a new platform for emerging composers, will feature leading industry professionals in panel discussions. **Composer-to-Composer Talks** feature major American composers in talks about their work and leading a creative life. ACO's education programs, **Sonic Spark Lab** and **Compose Yourself!**, will continue with distance learning programs that use composition as a platform to unlock middle and high school students' creativity.

Also launching this fall is ACO's pilot program for **Pathways**, a four-year fellowship that provides training, mentorship, and a sequence of commissions for composers who seek training in composing for orchestra. The program is designed for creative artists who come from diverse musical backgrounds and seek individualized study and mentorship. **Anjna Swaminathan**, a versatile artist in the field of South Indian Carnatic violin, has been selected as the pilot Pathways Fellow.

In 2021, ACO currently plans to return to the concert hall for two spring performances at **Carnegie Hall** and the **Apollo Theater**, as well as for the **30th ACO EarShot New Music Readings** (formerly the Underwood New Music Readings) in June. ACO and its partners and co-producing organizations will work together to present these performances following all state and local guidelines, to ensure the health and well-being of the performers and audience.

As previously announced, ACO's concert at Carnegie Hall on April 20, 2021 includes a world premiere by 2019 Underwood Commission Winner **Carlos Bandera** as well as New York premieres of two violin concertos by **Christopher Cerrone** and **Lisa Bielawa** for soloist **Jennifer Koh**. Cerrone's *Violin Concerto "Breaks and Breaks"* features intense dialogues between solo violin and orchestra as they comment on current affairs. Bielawa's *Sanctuary* meditates on the concept of sanctuary and its significance in the American consciousness. It is a deeply personal composition with moving quotations of Chopin and Bach – music in which Bielawa finds her own sanctuary. Carlos Bandera's *Materia Prima* is commissioned by ACO as a result of his 2019 Underwood New Music Readings Commission win. The work considers the origin story of the universe shared across many cultures, and is described by Bandera as, "a contemplation of our fundamental sameness." Bielawa's *Sanctuary* is supported by ACO's Commission Club.

In late spring 2021, ACO will partner with the **Apollo Theater** to co-present *An Evening of Sound, Voice, Poetry, and Healing*, showcasing three musical works written to create space for remembrance, mourning, celebration, and reflection. Directed and co-curated by National Black Theatre Artistic Director **Jonathan McCrory**, with musical co-curation by ACO's **Derek Bermel**, the evening will include the New York premieres of *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* by **Joel Thompson** and *AMEN!* by **Carlos Simon**, as well as *Reflections* by **Tania León**, a setting of poems by Rita Dove. Featuring ACO with additional instrumentalists from Black-led musical organizations and members of community and church choirs from the New York Area, the performance will combine music with spoken word and other rituals. Additional details, including workshops and audience conversation events, will be announced at a later date.

"The opportunity to collaborate with the historic Apollo Theater allows ACO to project our core values – artistic excellence, community engagement, and showcasing vibrant American voices," said Derek Bermel. "Our partnership on this project – which features three new and vibrant orchestral works by Tania León, Carlos Simon and Joel Thompson – has been a year in the making, but unfortunately, the themes resonate today more urgently than ever throughout our city, country, and beyond."

The **ACO EarShot New Music Readings** will take place **Thursday, June 17** and **Friday, June 18, 2021** in New York City. Now in its 30th year, several composers from throughout the United States will be selected to receive a reading of a new work, led by ACO's Music Director George Manahan. As in the past, commission opportunities will be available to the participants.

American Composers Orchestra - 2020-2021 Season Details

FALL 2020 - ONLINE OFFERINGS

Connecting ACO Community

In April 2020, ACO launched **Connecting ACO Community**, a commissioning initiative in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the 19 total works commissioned across Volumes 1, 2, and 3, ACO has supported artists financially; created new work that will live beyond this crisis; and provided virtual, interactive performances to ACO's supporters and the general public. Commissioned composers include Ethan Iverson, Shara Nova, Vicente Hansen Atria, Sakari Dixon Vanderveer, Gity Razaz, Yuan-Chen Li, Joseph Pereira, Karena Ingram, Kristis Auznieks, Lembit Beecher, Alejandro Basulto Martinez, Tanner Porter, Vincent Calianno, and Wynton Guess. All of the performances are available on [ACO's YouTube Channel](#).

Remaining commissionees in the series include Amina Figarova composing duo for ACO flutists Susan Palma Nidel and Laura Conwesser on August 23; Dawn Norfleet composing for vocalist/pianist Clarice Assad on August 30; Guy Mintus composing for violinist Kelly Hall-Tompkins on September 13; and Brian Nabors composing for a sextet of ACO musicians (violinist Deborah Wong; violist Sandra Robbins; cellist Eugene Moye; bassoonist Harry Searing; flutist Diva Goodfriend Koven; and harpist Susan Jolles) on October 4. More information: <http://bit.ly/ACOCConnectVol3>

Professional Development Webinars & Composer-to-Composer Talks

Beginning in October, ACO will present a series of **Professional Development Webinars** with the American Composers Forum, featuring panel discussions by esteemed professionals in the industry about topics including Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Entrepreneurship and Creating an Ensemble; Film Composition; Fundraising via Supportive Individuals; Programming and Digital Curation; Publishing, Self-Publishing, and Management; Recording Law and Practice; Project Production and Recording; and more. ACO will also launch a series of **Composer-to-Composer Talks**, featuring major American composers in conversation with each other about their work and leading a creative life. All Professional Development Webinars will be free of charge, with registration required. The Composer-to-Composer Talks will be \$10 per session or all ten for \$75. Registration and a full schedule of events will be available starting on September 8 at www.americancomposers.org.

Pathways - Pilot Program

In 2020, ACO launched a pilot program of **Pathways**, a four-year fellowship that provides training, mentorship, and a sequence of commissions for composers who have not had orchestral training. Pathways was created in response to research revealing that many composers from underrepresented groups and/or whose work is grounded in non-Western European musical traditions have an interest, but not opportunities, to write for orchestra. Pathways is a partnership between ACO, International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), and the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy for Musicians (GLFCAM).

Anjna Swaminathan, a versatile artist in the field of South Indian Carnatic violin, has been selected as the pilot Pathways Fellow. In the 2020-21 season, she will complete the second year of her four-year fellowship. The Pathways program will accept its first full cohort of composers (four maximum) in 2022.

ACO Pathways is supported by a grant from the American Orchestras' **Futures Fund**. Created by the **League of American Orchestras** to support a variety of forward-thinking and experimental projects, the two-year American Orchestras' Futures Fund grants, made possible by the generous support of the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation, focus on artistic vibrancy, civic engagement, and organizational vitality. ACO is one of

eighteen orchestras and youth orchestras to receive grants of \$30,000 each to spark a culture of innovation and learning in U.S. orchestras.

Education

ACO's education classes will continue with distance learning programs that use composition as a platform to unlock students' creativity. **Sonic Spark Lab**, in partnership with Harlem School of the Arts, will be offered for middle and high school students. These eight-week courses teach students to engage with their creativity, harness their curiosity, and collaborate to complete original musical works. **Compose Yourself!** enters its 8th year teaching high school age musicians to compose their own music. Classes help young composers develop their musical voice and learn professional notation and production standards. Both programs will be available for individual students and schools; registration will open in September 2020. More information at www.americancomposers.org/educational-programs

SPRING 2021 ONLINE AND LIVE EVENTS

ACO's Commission Club

Now in its fourth year, ACO's Commission Club invites individuals to follow the creative process from start to finish, from discussing the composer's first creative spark, through the process of composing, and finally to the premiere at Carnegie Hall. Membership fees support expenses related to composer commission fee, printing, rehearsal, and performance costs. In return, members are invited to exclusive events to interact with the artists. This season, the Club will support **Lisa Bielawa's** new work *Sanctuary*, written for violin and string orchestra featuring **Jennifer Koh**.

Preview events will be planned virtually online for March and April 2021 before the New York performance at Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall on April 20, 2021. Membership levels include \$500 Member; \$300 Young Professional (40 years and younger); and \$300 to Sponsor an ACO Student Composer (the tax-deductible portion of memberships are \$398 and \$198, respectively). More info: <https://bit.ly/ACOCclub>

ACO and Jennifer Koh at Carnegie Hall

Tuesday, April 20, 2021 at 7:30 PM

Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall | 57th St. & 7th Ave. | NYC

George Manahan, Music Director & Conductor

Jennifer Koh, Violin

Tickets & Information: www.americancomposers.org/events/aco-jennifer-koh-at-carnegie-hall

CHRISTOPHER CERRONE: *Violin Concerto, "Breaks and Breaks"* (New York Premiere)

CARLOS BANDERA: *Materia Prima* (World Premiere, ACO Underwood New Music Readings Commission)

LISA BIELAWA: *Sanctuary* (New York Premiere, co-commissioned by ACO)

About the Program

Violinist **Jennifer Koh's** ongoing exploration of "The New American Concerto" provides the impetus for works by **Christopher Cerrone** and **Lisa Bielawa**. Koh's initiative encourages composers to engage with the issues of the day and respond to them with a violin concerto. Cerrone's *Violin Concerto, "Breaks and Breaks,"* features intense dialogues between solo violin and orchestra as they comment on current affairs. Bielawa's work meditates on the word *Sanctuary* and its significance in the American consciousness. It is a deeply personal work with moving quotations of Chopin and Bach – music where Bielawa finds her own sanctuary. **Carlos Bandera's** *Materia Prima* is commissioned by ACO as a result of his 2019 Underwood New Music Readings Commission. The work considers the origin story of the universe shared across many cultures, and is described by Bandera as, "a contemplation of our fundamental sameness."

Christopher Cerrone's *Violin Concerto, "Breaks and Breaks,"* takes its title from Stanley Kunitz's poem "The Testing Tree," which includes the lines, "In a murderous time / the heart breaks and breaks / and lives by

breaking.” Cerrone often found himself walking the streets of Brooklyn, repeating the line as a kind of mantra. He writes, “Everything in 2017 – personally, physically, politically – felt harder than usual. And while I am not a political artist by disposition, my work is both inherently and intentionally autobiographical, meaning: that personal is political.”

Lisa Bielawa’s *Sanctuary* explores the meaning of the word sanctuary in various contexts in the writings Bielawa discovered during her time as the 2018 William Randolph Hearst Artist Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society. She writes, “The word ‘sanctuary’ has new prominence and resonance in our current cultural climate. My task was simple: find instances of the use of ‘sanctuary’ in a broad range of American writings, in order to reach a greater understanding of its layered meaning within American consciousness. In all cases, ‘sanctuary’ carries a sense of the inviolable. It is used to appeal to a sense of the absolute. It appears in the rhetoric of both sides of every important American struggle: Abolition, Suffrage, Secession, Manifest Destiny, Temperance, Marriage Rights, and Civil Rights.”

Carlos Bandera’s *Materia Prima* is inspired by both the scientific and mythological explanations of our origins. Bandera writes, “When I begin working on a new piece, I often associate certain musical material with some aspect of nature, such as light or air. My aim is not to programmatically depict these aspects in the music; it is just a personal association that helps guide my creative process. When I started working on my new piece, *Materia Prima*, I felt that the musical materials I was coming up with had a strong association with water, and this led me to explore the mythological motif of the cosmic ocean. This motif, which appears in the creation stories of a strikingly wide variety of cultures and religions, describes a cosmic ocean of primordial, often chaotic waters from which the universe was created.”

About the Soloist & Composer

Violinist **Jennifer Koh** (she/hers) is recognized for her intense, commanding performances, delivered with dazzling virtuosity and technical assurance. A forward-thinking artist, she is dedicated to exploring a broad and eclectic repertoire, while promoting equity and inclusivity in classical music. She has expanded the contemporary violin repertoire through a wide range of commissioning projects, and has premiered more than 100 works written especially for her. Her quest for the new and unusual, sense of endless curiosity, and ability to lead and inspire a host of multidisciplinary collaborators, truly set her apart. Koh’s series include *Alone Together*, an online commissioning project and performances series in support of composers during the coronavirus crisis; *The New American Concerto*, which invites a diverse collective of composers to examine socio-cultural topics relevant to American life today through the form of the violin concerto; *Limitless* which explores the relationship between composer and performer through duo works played by Koh and the composers themselves; *Bach and Beyond*, which traces the history of the solo violin repertoire from Bach’s sonatas and partitas to pieces by 20th- and 21st-century composers; and *Shared Madness*, comprising short solo works that explore virtuosity in the 21st century, commissioned from over 30 composers. Koh has appeared with orchestras worldwide, among them the New York, Los Angeles, and Helsinki Philharmonics; Cleveland, Mariinsky, Minnesota, Philadelphia, and Philharmonia (London) Orchestras; and Atlanta, Baltimore, BBC, Chicago, Cincinnati, National, New World, NHK, RAI (Torino), and Singapore Symphonies. Named *Musical America’s* 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year, she has won the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, Concert Artists Guild Competition, and an Avery Fisher Career Grant. She has a BA in English literature from Oberlin College and studied at the Curtis Institute, where she worked extensively with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir. She is an active lecturer, teacher, and recording artist for Cedille Records; and is the Artistic Director and Founder of the non-profit *arco collaborative*. www.jenniferkoh.com

Christopher Cerrone (he/his) is internationally acclaimed for compositions characterized by a subtle handling of timbre and resonance, a deep literary fluency, and a flair for multimedia collaborations. Recent commissions include a violin concerto for Jennifer Koh and the Detroit Symphony, a percussion concerto for Third Coast Percussion, and three works for the LA Philharmonic. His new piano concerto for Shai Wosner, *The Air Suspended*, will be heard in six cities this season. His opera, *Invisible Cities*, based on Italo Calvino’s novel, was a finalist for the 2014 Pulitzer Prize and his sophomore album, *The Pieces That Fall to Earth*, was released

on New Amsterdam Records in July 2019 to critical acclaim and a GRAMMY nomination. He is also the winner of the 2015-2016 Samuel Barber Rome Prize in Music Composition. Christopher Cerrone holds degrees from Yale and the Manhattan School of Music, is published by Schott NY, and joined the composition faculty of the Peabody Conservatory for 2019–2020. www.christophercerrone.com.

Carlos Bandera (he/his) is a composer whose music searches for a feeling of transcendence and reflects on aspects of the human experience. He often draws on a deep appreciation of the music of the past and experiments with the interplay of seemingly disparate musical materials. His music has been performed by groups such as the Illinois Philharmonic, Hastings Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, Dogs of Desire, Hotel Elephant, Earspace, Hebrides Ensemble, Nebula Ensemble, Omnibus Ensemble, and Now Hear This. He has attended Composers Conference, Copland House’s CULTIVATE program, the Delian Academy for New Music, and Time of Music. In 2015, Bandera earned his Bachelor of Music degree from Montclair State University, where he studied with Elizabeth Brown, Dean Drummond, and Marcos Balter. He received his Master of Music degree in 2017 from Peabody Conservatory, where he participated in masterclasses with Christopher Rouse and Georg Friedrich Haas and studied privately with Kevin Puts. Carlos Bandera is currently pursuing a PhD in Music Composition and Music Technology from Northwestern University. www.carlosbandera.com

Composer, vocalist, and producer **Lisa Bielawa** (she/hers) is a Rome Prize winner in Musical Composition and takes inspiration for her work from literary sources and close artistic collaborations. Her music has been described as “ruminative, pointillistic and harmonically slightly tart,” by *The New York Times*. She is the recipient of the 2017 Music Award from the American Academy of Arts & Letters; was named a William Randolph Hearst Visiting Artist Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society for 2018; and was recently awarded a 2020 Discovery Grant from OPERA America’s Grants for Female Composers. She began touring as the vocalist with the Philip Glass Ensemble in 1992 and recently became the Composer-in-Residence and Chief Curator of the Philip Glass Institute. She received a 2018 Los Angeles Area Emmy nomination for her made-for-TV-and-online opera *Vireo: The Spiritual Biography of a Witch's Accuser*, created with librettist Erik Ehn and director Charles Otte. Bielawa’s work consistently incorporates community-making, including *Broadcast from Home*, a large-scale interactive work in response to the coronavirus pandemic crisis; and music for public spaces in New York City, San Francisco, Berlin, Rome, and more. In 1997, she co-founded the MATA Festival, which celebrates the work of young composers. www.lisabelawa.net

Listen to music by Cerrone, Bandera and Bielawa:

Christopher Cerrone: <https://open.spotify.com/artist/65KzV13nlyMF2b288BK5qp>

Carlos Bandera: <http://www.carlosbandera.com/listen.html>

Lisa Bielawa: <https://open.spotify.com/artist/79y0Q0J9mytOp4wxRLNHTR>

An Evening of Sound, Voice, Poetry, and Healing

Late Spring 2021

Apollo Theater | 253 W 125th St. | NYC

Co-presented by American Composers Orchestra & the Apollo Theater

George Manahan, conductor and music director

Tania León, conductor

Jonathan McCrory, co-curator and director

Program to include:

TANIA LEÓN (text by Rita Dove): *Reflections* for soprano and chamber ensemble

CARLOS SIMON: *AMEN!* (New York Premiere; orchestra version co-commissioned by ACO)

JOEL THOMPSON: *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* (New York Premiere)

About the Program

ACO will partner with the **Apollo Theater** to co-present *An Evening of Sound, Voice, Poetry, and Healing* in late spring 2021, showcasing three musical works written to create space for remembrance, mourning, celebration, and reflection. Directed and co-curated by National Black Theatre Artistic Director **Jonathan McCrory**, with musical curation by ACO's **Derek Bermel**, the evening will include the New York premieres of *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* by **Joel Thompson** and *AMEN!* by **Carlos Simon** as well as *Reflections* by **Tania León**, which sets the poetry of Rita Dove. Featuring ACO with additional instrumentalists from Black-led musical organizations and members of community and church choirs from the New York Area, the performance will combine music with spoken word and other rituals.

Joel Thompson began composing *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* in 2014 after the killing of Eric Garner in Staten Island. Thompson writes, "*Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* wasn't written to be heard. It was essentially a sonic diary entry expressing my fear, anger, and grief in the wake of this tragedy. . . Finishing this work in early January 2015 was a much-needed catharsis; I felt exorcised of the emotions that had drained my spirit. However, Freddie Gray's death the following April urged me to try to bring *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* to life. . . Liturgical settings of the Seven Last Words of Christ are not attempting to demonize the Roman soldiers that orchestrated the crucifixion, but they are designed to stir within the listener an empathy towards the suffering of Jesus. Similarly, this piece is not an anti-police protest work; it is really a meditation on the lives of these black men and an effort to focus on their humanity, which is often eradicated in the media to justify their deaths." *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* was premiered in 2017 for the 20th anniversary of the Sphinx Organization.

Carlos Simon's *AMEN!* was commissioned by the University of Michigan Symphony Band and is an homage to Simon's family's four-generational affiliation with the Pentecostal church. Simon says of the work, "My intent is to recreate the musical experience of an African American Pentecostal church service that I enjoyed being a part of while growing up in this denomination. The title refers to the plagal cadence or 'Amen' cadence (IV-I), which is the focal point of the climax in the final movement. Along with heavily syncopated rhythms and interjecting contrapuntal lines, this cadence modulates up by half step until we reach a frenzied state, emulating a spiritually heightened state of worship." The orchestral arrangement of *AMEN!* was co-commissioned by ACO, the Reno Philharmonic, and Gateways Music Festival.

Tania León's *Reflections* is a song cycle setting the poems of Rita Dove, Pulitzer Prize winner and former U.S. Poet Laureate. León says, "The set of songs, written for female voice and mixed ensemble, is a work that weaves in and out of influences of American Music genres. Each song in the cycle portrays a different mood."

About the Director & Composers

Jonathan McCrory (he/his) is a two-time Obie Award-winning, Crain's New York Business 2020 Notable LGBTQ Leader. As a Harlem-based artist, he served as Artistic Director at National Black Theatre since 2012 under the leadership of CEO, Sade Lythcott. As Artistic Director (Creative Duala), he is the creative heart of the institution helping to select, develop and manage acclaimed programs and productions, such as *The Peculiar Patriot* and *Kill Move Paradise*. His creative force also helped the theatre expand its reach with the creation of the National Black Theatre of Sweden. As a director, he has helmed numerous productions including *Dead and Breathing*, *HandsUp*, and *Blacken The Bubble* and devised works like *Hope Speaks*, *Evoking Him: Baldwin and Emergence: A Communion* (based on adrienne marie brown's book *Emergent Strategy*). He has been acknowledged as an exceptional leader additionally through Executives and in 2016 he was awarded 40 under 40 Rising Star award from the New York Nonprofit Media. He has been awarded the Emerging Producer Award by the National Black Theatre Festival of Winston Salem, North Carolina and the Torch Bearer Award by theatrical legend Woodie King Jr. He is a founding member of the producing organizations Harlem9, the Movement Theatre Company and national services organizations such as Black Theater Commons and Next Generation National Network. McCrory sits on the National Advisory Committee for Howlround.com and was

a member of the original cohort for ArtEquity. He is also on the steering committee of the JUBILEE, working to help artists from marginalized communities. In 2019, McCrory was appointed to the nomination committee of the Tony Awards and he was also a member of the nominating committee for the Lucille Lortel Awards. A Washington, DC native, McCrory attended Duke Ellington School of the Arts and earned his BFA from New York University Tisch School of the Arts. www.jonathanmccrory.com

Tania León (she/hers; b. Havana, Cuba) is a highly regarded composer, conductor, educator, and advisor to arts organizations. Recent commissions include works for New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, the Grossman Ensemble and International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE). Appearances as guest conductor include the Symphony Orchestra of Marseille, the Gewandhausorchester Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfonica de Guanajuato, and Orquesta Sinfonica de Cuba. A founding member of the Dance Theatre of Harlem, she instituted the Brooklyn Philharmonic Community Concert Series, co-founded the American Composers Orchestra “Sonidos de las Americas Festivals,” was New Music Advisor to the New York Philharmonic, and is the founder/Artistic Director of Composers Now. Her honors include the New York Governor’s Lifetime Achievement and the ASCAP Victor Herbert Awards, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the American Academy of Arts and Science. She also received a proclamation for Composers Now by New York City Mayor, and the MadWoman Festival Award in Music (Spain). León has received Honorary Doctorate Degrees from Colgate University, Oberlin, and SUNY Purchase Colleges. She served as U.S. Artistic Ambassador of American Culture in Madrid, Spain. A CUNY Professor Emerita, she was awarded a 2018 United States Artists Fellowship. www.tanialeon.com

Carlos Simon’s (he/his) latest album, *My Ancestor's Gift*, was released on the Navona Records label in April 2018. Described as an “overall driving force” (*Review Graveyard*) and featured on Apple Music’s Albums to Watch, *My Ancestor's Gift* incorporates spoken word and historic recordings to craft a multifaceted program of musical works that are inspired as much by the past as they are the present. As a part of the Sundance Institute, Simon was named as a Sundance Composer Fellow in 2018, which was held at the historic Skywalker Ranch. His string quartet, *Elegy*, honoring the lives of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and Eric Garner was recently performed at the Kennedy Center for the Mason Bates JFK Jukebox Series. With support from the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo and U.S./Japan Foundation, Simon traveled with the Asia/America New Music Institute (AANMI) on a two-week tour of Japan in 2018 performing concerts in some of the most sacred temples and concert spaces in Japan including Suntory Hall in Tokyo, Japan. Simon earned his doctorate degree at the University of Michigan, where he studied with Michael Daugherty and Evan Chambers. He has also received degrees from Georgia State University and Morehouse College. Additionally, he studied in Baden, Austria at the Hollywood Music Workshop with Conrad Pope and at New York University’s Film Scoring Summer Workshop. www.coliversimon.com

Joel Thompson (he/his) is an Atlanta-based composer, conductor, pianist, and educator, best known for the choral work, *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, which was premiered November 2015 by the University of Michigan Men’s Glee Club and Dr. Eugene Rogers and won the 2018 American Prize for Choral Composition. His pieces have been performed by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Master Chorale, Los Angeles Master Chorale, EXIGENCE, and the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus. His opera, *The Snowy Day*, based on the beloved children's book by Ezra Jack Keats, will be premiered by The Houston Grand Opera in 2021. Currently a doctoral student at the Yale School of Music, Thompson was also a 2017 post-graduate fellow in Arizona State University’s Ensemble Lab/Projecting All Voices Initiative and a composition fellow at the 2017 Aspen Music Festival and School, where he won the Hermitage Prize. His teachers include Hannah Lash, Christopher Theofanidis, Aaron Jay Kernis, David Lang, John Anthony Lennon, and Stephen Hartke. Thompson taught at Holy Innocents’ Episcopal School in Atlanta 2015-2017, and also served as Director of Choral Studies and Assistant Professor of Music at Andrew College 2013-2015. Thompson is a proud Emory alum, graduating with a B.A. in Music in 2010, and an M.M. in Choral Conducting in 2013.

Listen to music by León, Simon, and Thompson:

Tania León: <https://open.spotify.com/artist/4zwoaSbF8wRavPpkLT11h2>

Carlos Simon: <https://open.spotify.com/artist/25U2MSksQUgokSJw5snr9G>

Joel Thompson: <https://youtu.be/zdNXoqNuLRQ>

ACO EarShot New Music Readings

Thursday, June 17 and Friday, June 18, 2021 | NYC

George Manahan, music director and conductor

ACO will hold its **30th Annual New Music Readings** for emerging composers in New York City in June. In what has become a rite of passage for aspiring orchestral composers, several composers from throughout the United States will be selected to receive a reading of a new work. The Readings are open to the public for a nominal admission price. A working rehearsal will be presented on **Thursday, June 17, 2021**; on **Friday, June 18, 2021**, all selected pieces will be polished and performed in their entirety, led by ACO's Music Director George Manahan. ACO's Artistic Director Derek Bermel directs the Readings.

Each participating composer receives rehearsal, reading, and a digital recording of his or her work. Review and feedback sessions with ACO principal players, mentor composers, guest conductors, and industry representatives provide crucial artistic, technical, and career assistance. As usual, commission opportunities will be available to this year's participants.

For over a generation, ACO's New Music Readings have been providing all-important career development and public exposure to the country's most promising emerging composers, with over 150 composers participating. Readings composers have gone on to win every major composition award, including the Pulitzer, Grammy, Grawemeyer, Guggenheim, American Academy of Arts & Letters, and Rome Prizes. Orchestras around the globe have commissioned and performed hundreds of works by ACO Readings alumni. The New Music Readings have, for 30 years, served as a launch pad for composers' careers, a tradition that includes many of today's top composers, such as **Ellen Taaffe Zwilich** and **Joseph Schwantner**, both of whom received Pulitzer Prizes for ACO commissions; and ACO's own Artistic Director **Derek Bermel**, as well as composers **Lisa Bielawa**, **Anthony Cheung**, **Anna Clyne**, **Cindy Cox**, **Sebastian Currier**, **Jennifer Higdon**, **Pierre Jalbert**, **Aaron Jay Kernis**, **Hannah Lash**, **Ingram Marshall**, **Carter Pann**, **P.Q. Phan**, **Tobias Picker**, **Narong Prangcharoen**, **Paola Prestini**, **David Rakowski**, **Daniel Bernard Roumain**, **Christopher Rouse**, **Huang Ruo**, **Eric Samuelson**, **Carlos Sanchez-Guiterrez**, **Kate Soper**, **Gregory Spears**, **Joan Tower**, **Ken Ueno**, **Dan Visconti**, **Melinda Wagner**, **Wang Jie**, **Dalit Warshaw**, **Anthony R. Green**, **Randall Woolf**, **Nina Young**, and **Roger Zare**.

About Derek Bermel, ACO Artistic Director

Twice Grammy-nominated composer-clarinetist **Derek Bermel** has been hailed for his creativity, theatricality, and virtuosity. An "eclectic with wide open ears" (*Toronto Star*), Bermel is acclaimed for music that is "intricate, witty, clear-spoken, tender, and extraordinarily beautiful [and] covers an amazing amount of ground, from the West African rhythms of *Dust Dances* to the Bulgarian folk strains of *Thracian Echoes*, to the shimmering harmonic splendor of *Elixir*. In the hands of a composer less assured, all that globe-trotting would seem like an affectation; Bermel makes it an artistic imperative." (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

His engagement with myriad musical cultures has become part of the fabric and force of his compositional language. In addition to his role as Artistic Director of American Composers Orchestra, he is also Director of Copland House's CULTIVATE emerging composers' institute, served for four-years as Artist-in-Residence at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study and is Curator of the Gamper Festival of Contemporary Music (Bowdoin International Music Festival). Recognized as a dynamic and unconventional curator and creator, his work has been performed by renowned artists worldwide. His commissioners have included the Pittsburgh, National, Saint Louis, New Jersey, Boston, and Pacific Symphonies, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles,

New Century, and St. Paul Chamber Orchestras, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, WNYC Radio, eighth blackbird, the Guarneri, Ying, and JACK Quartets, Seattle and La Jolla Chamber Music Society, Music from Copland House and Music from China, FIGURA (Denmark) Ensembles, Midori, ASKO/Schoenberg Ensemble and Veenfabriek (Netherlands).

The Boston Globe writes, “There doesn't seem to be anything that Bermel can't do with the clarinet.” As a performer he has worked with a dizzyingly eclectic array of artists, including as soloist alongside Wynton Marsalis in his own *Migration Series*, commissioned by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and ACO, recorded on Naxos by the Albany Symphony and Juilliard Jazz Orchestra, and nominated for a 2020 Grammy as Best Contemporary Classical Composition. Bermel’s clarinet concerto *Voices* premiered at Carnegie Hall, with the composer as soloist, and he has performed the critically acclaimed work with more than a dozen orchestras, including the BBC Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and at the Beijing Modern Music Festival. His performance of *Voices* with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project led to a Grammy-nominated recording for Best Soloist with Orchestra. Founding clarinetist of the acclaimed Music from Copland House ensemble, Bermel’s chamber music appearances also include performances with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center; Borromeo, Pacifica, and JACK quartets; festivals including Moab, Fontana, Cape Cod, and Salt Bay; the Cliburn Series at the Modern, Carmel and Albuquerque Chamber Music Series, Garth Newel Center, Seattle Town Hall, and Louisville Chamber Music Society. He has collaborated on several film scores, and with artists such as playwright Will Eno, installation artist Shimon Attie, choreographer Sheron Wray, poets Wendy S. Walters and Sandra Cisneros, and hip hop legend Yasiin Bey (Mos Def).

Bermel's many honors include the Alpert Award in the Arts, Rome Prize, Guggenheim and Fulbright Fellowships, New Music USA's Trailblazer Award, and Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, commissions from the Koussevitzky and Fromm Foundations, and residencies at Yaddo, Tanglewood, Aspen, Banff, Bellagio, Copland House, Sacatar, and Civitella Ranieri.

About George Manahan, ACO Music Director

ACO’s Music Director, the wide-ranging and versatile **George Manahan**, has had an esteemed career embracing everything from opera to the concert stage, the traditional to the contemporary. He is also the Music Director of Portland Opera (OR), previously served as Music Director of New York City Opera for fourteen seasons, and has appeared as guest conductor with the Opera Companies of Seattle, Santa Fe, San Francisco, Chicago, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Opera National du Paris and Teatro de Comunale de Bologna and the National, New Jersey, Atlanta, San Francisco, Milwaukee, and Indianapolis Symphonies, and the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. In 2013, Manahan was awarded the Alice M. Ditson Award for his outstanding commitment to the work of emerging composers, and was honored four times by the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) for his commitment to 20th-century music during his tenure as Music Director of the Richmond Symphony (VA).

Dedicated to the music of our time, he has led premieres of Tobias Picker’s *Dolores Claiborne*, Charles Wuorinen’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, David Lang’s *Modern Painters*, Hans Werner Henze’s *The English Cat*, Terence Blanchard’s *Champion*, the New York premiere of Richard Danielpour’s *Margaret Garner*, and Emmy Award-winning composer Laura Karpman’s Grammy Award winning *Ask Your Mama*, a collaboration with soprano Jessye Norman, The Roots, and Orchestra of St. Luke’s. Recent seasons have included appearances at Santa Fe Opera, Rose Theater at Lincoln Center in a concert performance of Gluck’s *Alceste* featuring Deborah Voigt, Music Academy of the West, and the Aspen Music Festival. The Live from Lincoln Center broadcast of his New York City Opera production of *Madame Butterfly* won an Emmy Award.

Manahan’s discography includes the Grammy-nominated recording of Edward Thomas' *Desire Under the Elms* with the London Symphony, and Steve Reich’s *Tehillim* on the EMI-Warner Brothers label. He is Director of Orchestral Activities at the Manhattan School of Music as well as a frequent guest conductor at the Curtis Institute of Music.

About American Composers Orchestra

American Composers Orchestra (ACO) is dedicated to the creation, celebration, performance, and promotion of orchestral music by American composers. With commitment to diversity, disruption and discovery, ACO produces concerts, middle school through college composer education programs, and emerging composer development programs to foster a community of creators, audience, performers, collaborators, and funders.

ACO identifies and develops talent, performs established composers, champions those who are lesser-known, and increases regional, national, and international awareness of the infinite variety of American orchestral music, reflecting gender, ethnic, geographic, stylistic, and age diversity. To date, ACO has performed music by 800 American composers, including over 350 world premieres and newly commissioned works. ACO recordings are available on ARGO, CRI, ECM, Point, Phoenix USA, MusicMasters, Nonesuch, Tzadik, New World Records, InstantEncore.com, Amazon.com and iTunes.

EarShot – in collaboration with the League of American Orchestras, New Music USA and American Composers Forum – enables ACO and partner orchestras across the country to identify talented young composers. With guidance from ACO, partner orchestras – such as the Detroit Symphony, the Sarasota (FL) Orchestra, the Charlotte Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra – undertake readings, residencies, performances and composer-development programs that speak directly to their communities and leverage local resources. ACO itself holds annual readings in New York with a multi-performance commission awarded to the most promising participant through the Composing a New Orchestra Audience platform.

For nearly two decades, ACO has brought composers and musical teaching artists into New York City public schools through Sonic Spark (formerly known as Music Factory). Sonic Spark aims to leverage composition as a platform for creativity, and creativity as a platform for achievement in all areas of student's life. Students in Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan and Queens, work directly with professional composers to create and perform original music. ACO also offers the intensive Compose Yourself! seminars, during which high school and college composers participate in hands-on composition classes, culminating in a performance of student compositions played by ACO's professional musicians.

More information about American Composers Orchestra and resources about American orchestral composers is available online at www.americancomposers.org.

This press release is available online at www.americancomposers.org/about-aco/news-room.

###

Institutional Support for American Composers Orchestra is provided by Herb Alpert Foundation, American Orchestras' Futures Fund, Amphion Foundation, Inc., ASCAP, ASCAP Foundation, BMI Foundation, BMI, Inc., Cheswaty Foundation, Edward T. Cone Foundation, Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, Jean and Louis Dreyfus Foundation, Baisley Powell Elebash Fund, Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, Ford Foundation's Good Neighbor Committee, Fromm Music Foundation, Howard Gilman Foundation, Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts, G. Schirmer, Hearst Foundations, Richard R. Howe Foundation, Jephson Educational Trusts, Edward and In-Aie Kang Foundation, The J. M. Kaplan Fund, Kettles and Company, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Mitsubishi Corporation (Americas), Morgan Stanley, Neiman Marcus Group Associates Giving Program, Network for Good, NYC COVID-19 Response and Impact Fund in The New York Community Trust, Pacific Harmony Foundation, Paypal, Rexford Fund, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rolex Institute, Schlam Stone & Dolan LLP, Sphinx Organization, and Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation.

ACO programs are made possible with public funds provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

The commission of the new work by Carlos Bandera is made possible by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Underwood.

Connecting ACO Community is supported by lead gifts from Augusta Gross and Leslie Samuels and the NYC COVID-19 Response and Impact Fund in The New York Community Trust.

ACO's Pathways Pilot is made possible by a grant from the American Orchestras' Futures Fund, a program of the League of American Orchestras made possible by the generous support of the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation.

The co-production between ACO and Apollo Theater is made possible with generous funding from Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Linda and Stuart Nelson, Anonymous (2), Morgan Stanley, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and The New York Community Trust.

EarShot is a program of American Composers Orchestra completed in partnership with American Composers Forum, the League of American Orchestras, and New Music USA. The program is made possible with the support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Fromm Foundation, The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, and Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University. Additional funding is provided by the League of American Orchestras with support of the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation.

American Composers Orchestra

Derek Bermel, *Artistic Director* | George Manahan, *Music Director* | Edward Yim, *President*

Dennis Russell Davies, *Conductor Laureate* | Robert Beaser, *Artistic Director Laureate*

494 8th Avenue, Suite 503 | New York, NY 10001

Phone: 212.977.8495 | Web: www.americancomposers.org