

# A Violin Concerto

*Christopher Adler and Sarah Plum*

I first performed Christopher Adler's violin solo *Jolie Sphinx* on the prestigious *Ankunft: Neue Musik* series at the Berlin Hauptbahnhof in the summer of 2011. It was the official CD release concert for *Absconditus*, *Music of Sidney Corbett*, and I needed additional solo works to complete the program. Fortuitously, I asked Sidney for recommendations and he mentioned Christopher Adler, who had been his student at Duke.

I connected with the piece immediately. It was challenging but there was a clear sense of expansion and contraction of thematic material, a place for my contribution as an interpreter and a clear and original compositional voice. Working on it that summer and preparing for the Berlin concerts had been immensely satisfying and it got me thinking.

I had been looking for a piece to pair with another violin concerto, *Yael*, written by Sidney Corbett, since premiering it in the U.S. earlier that summer. So, that fall I asked Christopher to write me a violin concerto. I

was thrilled when he agreed. With grant support from Drake University, a year later we premiered the second movement, in a version for violin and piano, at the Firehouse Space in New York City. And on Feb 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014, we premiered a violin and piano version of the first movement at the University of San Diego.

In the 2014-15, with grant support from the University of San Diego and Drake University, we will record the complete concerto with an orchestra from San Diego New Music and conductor Nicholas Deyoe.



It is always exciting to have a piece written for you but this concerto has surpassed my expectations. I truly feel like it will be a piece for the ages with its impressive rhythmic subtlety, polished orchestration and sense of the instrument. —SP

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Video links: [Violin Concerto, complete MIDI realization](#)

[Violin Concerto, I. Shift \(The Knife Grinder\)  
Live performance with piano reduction](#)

*Violin Concerto* is an homage to Russian futurism and the visionary experiments that led the artistic avant-garde in the early twentieth century, and is inspired also by two of the great violin concertos of the era and my personal favorites, Prokofiev's first and Stravinsky's. I have explored the theme of humanity seeking self-definition in an increasingly mechanized and technologized world in earlier works, including *Signals Intelligence* for percussion, the flute solo *010 machine states*, and the violin solo *Jolie Sphinx*. The Russian futurists envisioned a technological transformation of humanity led by the visionary arts and an aesthetic of acceleration and dynamism. For a brief historical moment, artists were transfixed by a radically modern vision of the future and captivated with the notion of art as the agent of transformation, until catastrophically coopted under Stalinism. My *Violin Concerto* represents my imaginative inhabitation of this historical moment, with human expression struggling to bring a techno-utopian ecumene into existence.

The first movement is inspired by the paintings of Kazimir Malevich who froze dynamic motion into still images before cinema existed, envisioned humans as idealized conglomerations of metallic forms, and pioneered a proto-minimalist reductionism of form. The "shift" (*sdvig*), the sudden disruption or shearing of the visual surface that evokes dynamic motion, was an essential component of Malevich's cubist-inspired paintings, including "The Knife Grinder / Principle of Flickering" from 1913.



The title of the second movement, *Vèrelloe*, is an invented word from the trans-rational sound poem "City Spring" by Konstantin Bolshakov, written in 1913. Trans-rational poetry is a product of thought moving faster than language and a vision of a future beyond words, here dwelling upon a fleeting moment: "Vizizàmi vizàmi the silence scurries / Kissing in the quieted vèrelloe of a trill, / Aksimèiu, oksàmi zizàm from sleep, / Aksemèiu oksàmi zasim izomelit."

In the third and final movement, the orchestra is atomized and reassembled into churning choruses of machines as the soloist struggles for autonomy. Developing from Malevich's atomization of painting, in 1922 Constructivist Alexei Gan unified aesthetics and Marxist political action into a triumvirate of disciplines: *tektonika*, *konstruksiia* and *faktura*. Inspired by geology, *tektonika* was the violent, volcanic reconstitution of elements into new forms. Constructivist architect Moisei Ginzburg clarified Gan's vision into practice: the new technologies of the machine were the forms of the future. –CA

"To feel the significance, the meaningfulness, of the sonorous ensemble of contemporary life, to be embraced by its joys and fears, its rhythm, its landscapes, its sky riddled with wires and hovering aeroplanes; to understand distance as it is broken down into fragments by the movement of the machine; the street cut about with sharp silhouettes, a bridge and the minute specks of the pedestrians scattered upon it—to feel all this and to formulate an adequate expression of it, is the task of our contemporary creativity." – Moisei Ginzburg, 1924



# Sarah Plum

violinist

Sarah Plum has dedicated her career to the proposition that a musician should be actively engaged with the music of our own time as well as that of the past.

Plum began her performing career by winning the first prize at the International Stulberg Competition in 1984. Since then she has been sought after by orchestras and fellow musicians in the US and Europe as a soloist, recitalist and chamber musician for concerts of both traditional and contemporary repertoire and has performed at festivals and

venues such as Ars Musica Brussels, Cite de Musique, The Barbican, The Luzern Festival and Ankunft: Neue Musik Berlin. Most recently, she has played chamber music concerts at the Festival de Musique "Zodiac" in the south of France as well as presented solo concerts of new music in Berlin, New York City and at Bard College.

As a new music specialist, Plum has had the good fortune to take part in historic performances and premieres with noted composers and ensembles. Her long-term collaborations with composers have led to CDs such as her 2011 solo release of works by Sidney Corbett, *Absconditus*. This CD has been called "flinty and stark yet atmospheric" by music web, "a gem" by the American Record Guide and Gramophone Magazine said that "Sarah Plum plays with a wealth of colour and a surprising range of sounds".

Since this release Plum has been invited to perform an evolving solo program of 21<sup>st</sup>-century works, many of which were written for her, at new music festivals and series worldwide. These programs have been praised as "consistently stunning with works that demanded conventional virtuosity but also great skill in unconventional techniques" (third coast journal) and "extraordinary, meaningful and magnificent music" (Berlin Tageszeitung). For these programs Plum has collaborated with composers Mari Kimura, Charles Nichols, Mari Takano, Sidney Boquiren, Jeff Herriot, Sidney Corbett and Christopher Adler.

Plum is also currently recording the complete works of Bartok for violin alone and violin and piano with her long time duo partner, Timothy Lovelace. The first of a projected two CD project will be released in early 2014 on the Bluegriffin label. Plum has been heard in numerous TV and radio broadcasts on the WDR, NDR, Deutsche Welle, BBC and Iowa Public Radio. She has recorded on the Bluegriffin, Bridge, BMG, Albany, Arte Nova and Capriccio labels.

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# Christopher Adler

## composer

Christopher Adler is a composer, performer and improviser living in San Diego, California. His music draws upon fifteen years of research into the traditional musics of Thailand and Laos and a background in mathematics. He is internationally recognized as a foremost performer of new and traditional music for the khaen, a free-reed mouth organ from Laos and Northeast Thailand. He is a pianist for the nief-norf Project, and Director of Composition for the nief-norf Summer Festival. He is also the pianist and composer-in-residence with NOISE, an Affiliated Artist with San Diego New Music, and a co-founder of the soundON Festival of Modern Music.

Christopher Adler's compositions encompass cross-culturally hybrid forms drawn from contemporary concert music and traditional musics of Thailand and Laos, the application of mathematics to composition, and the integration of improvisation into structured composition. His works have been performed at Carnegie Hall, Chicago Symphony Center, Tanglewood, Merkin Hall, Sumida Triphony Hall in Tokyo, Bang on a Can, the MATA Festival, and at new music festivals and universities worldwide by ensembles including the Silk Road Ensemble, red fish blue fish, Ensemble ACJW, the Da Capo Chamber Players, pulsoptional, NOISE and the Seattle Creative Orchestra. His percussion quintet *Pines Long Slept in Sunshine* was commissioned by a consortium of ten percussion ensembles led by the University of Kentucky, and his cross-cultural ensemble work *Music for a Royal Palace* was commissioned by Carnegie Hall through The Weill Music Institute in partnership with the Silk Road Project, Inc. His virtuoso solo compositions have been championed by percussionists Morris Palter and Andrew Bliss, flutist Lisa Cella and guitarist Colin McAllister. His compositions have been released on *Ecstatic Volutions in a Neon Haze* (Innova) and *Epilogue for a Dark Day* (Tzadik), and on CDs by percussionists Omar Carmenates (Rattle Records) and Morris Palter (Blue Leaf Records).

Christopher Adler is the world's leading innovator in contemporary concert music for the khaen. With his ongoing project *New Musical Geographies*, he has promoted the instrument by commissioning and recording new works by composers including Sidney Marquez Boquiren, Christopher Burns, Jeff Herriott, and Matthew Welch.

Christopher Adler is currently Professor of Music at the University of San Diego. He received Ph.D. and Master's degrees in composition from Duke University and Bachelor's degrees in music composition and mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He studied composition with Scott Lindroth, Evan Ziporyn, Stephen Jaffe, Sidney Corbett, Thai music with Panya Roongruang, and pipe organ with James David Christie and Haig Mardirosian.

