Composer A. J. McCaffrey Wins $15,000 Underwood Emerging Composer Commission from American Composers Orchestra

Composer Nina Young Wins Annual Audience Choice Award

Deadline for the 2014 Underwood New Music Readings: December 2, 2013
Information: www.americancomposers.org/nmr

American Composers Orchestra: www.americancomposers.org

For high-resolution photos of McCaffrey and Young:
www.christinajensenpr.com (in ACO’s gallery)

New York, NY – American Composers Orchestra (ACO) is pleased to announce that composer A.J. McCaffrey has been named the winner of ACO’s 2013 Underwood Commission, bringing him a $15,000 purse for a work to be premiered by ACO in the 2014-2015 season. Chosen from six finalists during ACO’s 22nd Underwood New Music Readings on April 8 and 9, 2013, in one of the most coveted opportunities for emerging composers in the United States, A.J. won the top prize with his work Thank You for Waiting.

In addition, for the fourth year, audience members at the Underwood New Music Readings had a chance to make their voices heard through the Audience Choice Award. The winner this year was composer Nina Young, for her piece Remnants. As the winner, Nina was commissioned to compose an original mobile phone ringtone which is available to everyone who voted, free of charge.

“A.J.’s orchestral writing impresses at every level – the clarity of his sonic concept, the deft handling of often viscerally dense counterpoint, and above all, the energy that he gets from the ensemble through his orchestrational approach,” said Underwood New Music Readings mentor composer Christopher Theofanidis. Joan Tower, also a mentor composer this year, added, “A.J. McCaffrey is a composer with extraordinary chops. I am hoping his newly commissioned work will push the envelope further by taking musical risks that could create a formidable piece for orchestra.” Mentor composer and ACO Artistic Advisor Laureate Robert Beaser praised A.J. as well, saying, “A.J. is a composer who combines prodigious craft with a quirky sensibility. He produces works in a variety of styles – always surprising and arresting.”
Upon winning the Underwood commission, A.J. McCaffrey said, “I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work with ACO. I witnessed first-hand how well they tackle new music during the Readings this past spring, and I cannot wait to begin composing for them. It is overwhelming to be chosen – ACO had a fabulous group of pieces and composers to choose from and I am humbled to have been selected.”

A.J. McCaffrey is a songwriter and composer of instrumental, vocal and electronic music. With backgrounds and interests in theater, fine arts and literature, and an upbringing that fostered a love for a wide variety of musical styles, A.J. writes music that strives to tell a story. His works are theatrical in nature, employing harmonically rich and lyrically striking sound worlds to create moving, dramatic narratives. A.J.’s music has been commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Tanglewood Music Center, and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. In addition to ACO, his works have been performed by the New Fromm Players, Radius Ensemble, Atlantic Chamber Ensemble, and members of the Chiara Quartet, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Alarm Will Sound, and Scottish Chamber Orchestra. A fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center and Aspen Music Festival and School, A.J. has been a featured composer on BMOP’s The Next Next series, Tanglewood’s Festival of Contemporary Music, and the New Gallery Concert Series.

A.J. McCaffrey holds degrees in music composition from Rice University, The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and the University of Southern California, and has studied with Richard Lavenda, James MacMillan, Donald Crotchet, and Stephen Hartke. A passionate educator, he is an instructor for the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Composer Fellowship Program and the Longy School of Music at Bard College’s Masters of Arts in Teaching Music.

About the Underwood New Music Readings
The 22nd Underwood New Music Readings were under the direction of ACO’s Artistic Director, composer Robert Beaser, and were led by ACO Music Director George Manahan, with mentor composers Christopher Theofanidis and Joan Tower. The conductor, mentor composers, and principal players from ACO provided critical feedback to each of the participants during and after the sessions. In addition to the Readings, the composer participants took part in workshops and one-on-one sessions with industry professionals. This year's New Music Readings attracted over 130 submissions from emerging composers around the country. In addition to McCaffrey, the participants were:

Composer Jonathan Blumhofer (b. 1979) in Brooklyn, NY. His first musical activities involved studying violin and piano, and he later took up the viola. Jonathan’s compositions have received numerous awards and honors, including recognition from ASCAP, Massachusetts Cultural Council, Longfellow International Composers Competition, Boston University, and Boston Conservatory, among others. His compositions have been performed and recorded by a number of ensembles in the United States and Europe, including the Xanthos Ensemble, Juventas New Music Ensemble, and Camerata Chicago. Jonathan has taught at Clark University and Worcester Polytechnic Institute, in Worcester, MA, and at Gordon College in Wenham, MA. He earned his doctorate from Boston University, his master's degree from Boston Conservatory, and his bachelor's degree from Wheaton College.

Louis Chiappetta (b.1989) is a New York-based composer. His recent projects have included Fracture, a series of clarinet miniatures written in collaboration with choreographer Thomas Peacock and the London Contemporary Dance School, and Echoes of Embers for baritone and small ensemble. In March 2012 Louis participated in Carnegie Hall’s Weill Music Institute professional training workshop with Kaija Saariaho and Anssi Karttunen, which included the premiere of his trio Loops, Clocks, and Shadows.
at Zankel Hall. Louis began his formal composition studies at Mannes College of Music's Preparatory Division at the age of thirteen. He later went on to study with Keith Fitch at the Cleveland Institute of Music where he received his bachelor's degree in 2011.

Joshua Groffman (b. 1984) of Millbrook, NY has written works for orchestral, vocal, and chamber ensembles, as well as for electronic media, theater, and film. His music has been performed by groups including Ensemble Laboratorium, the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, the Delaware Valley Chorale, the Indiana University Contemporary Vocal Ensemble, and the Cornell University Chamber Singers, and selected for performance at festivals including the Aspen Music Festival, June in Buffalo, SEAMUS National Conference, Florida State University New Music Festival, the CUNY POP! Conference, Midwest Composers Symposium, and the 60x60 VoxNovus New York Minutes Mix. He graduated magna cum laude from Cornell University in 2007, where he completed double majors in music and history. Joshua holds Doctor of Music (2012) and Master of Music (2009) degrees from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

Saad N. Haddad (b. 1992) is an Arab-American composer based in Los Angeles whose music showcases his Middle-Eastern heritage. A junior at the University of Southern California, he is majoring in Music Composition with a minor in Cinematic Arts. In addition to his concert work, Saad has composed the soundtracks to eighteen short films, eight of which were recorded live by the Thornton School of Music at the John Williams Scoring Stage. He is currently scoring “Core Overload,” a video game thesis being developed at USC. In the summer of 2011, he was selected as the youngest of fourteen students across the United States to study with Professor Samuel Adler of the Juilliard School in Berlin as part of the Freie Universitat in Berlin International Summer Program.

Nina C. Young (b.1984) is a New York-based composer who writes instrumental and electronic music. Her pieces incorporate her research of blending amplification and live electronics into instrumental ensembles, always with a view toward creating a natural and cohesive sound world. Nina's music has been performed by ensembles such as the Orkest de Ereprijs, Nouvel Ensemble Moderne, JACK Quartet, Yarn/Wire and Sixtrum. Her music has received honors from BMI, the International Alliance for Women in Music, and the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States. She is currently a doctoral fellow at Columbia University, studying with Fred Lerdahl, Brad Garton, and George Lewis, where she also teaches electroacoustic composition at the Computer Music Center.

Writing for the symphony orchestra remains one of the supreme challenges for the aspiring composer. The subtleties of instrumental balance, timbre, and communication with the conductor and musicians are critical skills. Opportunities for composers to gain hands-on experience working with a professional orchestra are few. Since 1991 ACO’s New Music Readings have provided invaluable experience for emerging composers while serving as a vital resource to the music field by identifying a new generation of American composers. To date, more than 130 composers have participated in the Readings, including such award-winning composers as Melinda Wagner, Pierre Jalbert, Augusta Read Thomas, Randall Woolf, Jennifer Higdon, Daniel Bernard Roumain, Sebastian Currier, and ACO’s Creative Advisor, Derek Bermel.

The New Music Readings continue ACO’s emphasis on launching 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 Robert Beaser, Ingram Marshall, Joan Tower, Aaron Jay Kernis, Christopher Rouse, Sebastian Currier, and Tobias Picker, whom the orchestra championed when they were beginning their careers.
ACO’s 2012 winner, Peter Fahey, received the top prize for his work *Impressions*. His newly commissioned work, *A Mirror to Kathleen’s Face*, will be premiered by ACO at Carnegie Hall’s Zankel Hall on **October 25, 2013**. The 23rd Annual New Music Readings are scheduled for **June 6 and 7, 2014** at The DiMenna Center for Classical Music in New York City. This year, the Readings are part of the NY PHIL BIENNIAL. The submission deadline for composers interested in applying is **December 2, 2013** at 5pm Eastern. Complete submission guidelines and application are available at [www.americancomposers.org/nmr](http://www.americancomposers.org/nmr).

**About ACO**

Entering its 37th season, American Composers Orchestra is the only orchestra in the world dedicated to the creation, performance, preservation, and promulgation of music by American composers. ACO makes the creation of new opportunities for American composers and new American orchestral music its central purpose. Through concerts at Carnegie Hall and other venues, recordings, internet and radio broadcasts, educational programs, New Music Readings, and commissions, ACO identifies today’s brightest emerging composers, champions prominent established composers as well as those lesser-known, and increases regional, national, and international awareness of the infinite variety of American orchestral music, reflecting geographic, stylistic, and temporal diversity. ACO also serves as an incubator of ideas, research, and talent, as a catalyst for growth and change among orchestras, and as an advocate for American composers and their music.

To date, ACO has performed music by 700 American composers, including nearly 300 world premieres and newly commissioned works. Among the orchestra’s innovative programs have been SONiC: Sounds of a New Century, a nine-day citywide festival in New York of music by more than 100 composers age 40 and under; Sonidos de las Américas, six annual festivals devoted to Latin American composers and their music; Coming to America, a program immersing audiences in the ongoing evolution of American music through the work of immigrant composers; Orchestra Tech, a long-term initiative to integrate new digital technologies in the symphony orchestra; Improvis!, a festival devoted to the exploration of improvisation and the orchestra; coLABoratory: Playing It UNSafe, a new laboratory for the research and development of experimental new works for orchestra; and Orchestra Underground, ACO’s entrepreneurial cutting-edge orchestral ensemble that embraces new technology, eclectic instruments, influences, and spatial orientation of the orchestra, new experiments in the concert format, and multimedia and multi-disciplinary collaborations.

Composer development has been at the core of ACO’s mission since its founding. In addition to its annual Underwood New Music Readings and Commission, ACO also provides a range of additional educational and professional development activities, including composer residencies and fellowships. In 2008, ACO launched EarShot, a multi-institutional network that assists orchestras around the country in mounting new music readings. Recent Earshot programs have included the Nashville, Memphis, Colorado, San Diego Symphonies, the New York Youth Symphony, and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. For more information visit [www.EarShotnetwork.org](http://www.EarShotnetwork.org).

Among the honors ACO has received are special awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and from BMI recognizing the orchestra’s outstanding contribution to American music. ASCAP has awarded its annual prize for adventurous programming to ACO 35 times, singling out ACO as “the orchestra that has
done the most for American music in the United States.” ACO received the inaugural MetLife Award for Excellence in Community Engagement, and a proclamation from the New York City Council. ACO recordings are available on ARGO, CRI, ECM, Point, Phoenix USA, MusicMasters, Nonesuch, Tzadik, New World Records, InstantEncore.com, Amazon.com and iTunes. ACO’s digital albums include Playing It UNsafe (March 2011), Emerging Composers Series: Vol. 1 (February 2012), and the orchestra’s latest release, Orchestra Underground: X10D (June 2012), an album featuring unusual and extended solo instruments with the orchestra. More information about American Composers Orchestra is available online at www.americancomposers.org.

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This press release is available online at: www.americancomposers.org/press

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