



american composers orchestra

news release

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PRESS CONTACT: Maggie Stapleton
646-536-7864 x2; maggie@jensenartists.com

American Composers Orchestra Announces Three Commissions from the 2019 Underwood New Music Readings

Underwood Commission: Jack Hughes

Consortium for Emerging Composers Commission: Jihyun Kim

Audience Choice Commission: Aaron Israel Levin



Jack Hughes: www.soundcloud.com/jackhughes937 | Aaron Israel Levin: www.aaronisraellevin.com | Jihyun Kim: www.noeljihyunkim.com
| American Composers Orchestra: www.americancomposers.org

New York, NY – American Composers Orchestra (ACO) announces three commissions for emerging composers **Jack Hughes**, **Jihyun Kim**, and **Aaron Israel Levin**. They were chosen from six participants in ACO's 28th **Underwood New Music Readings**, one of the most coveted opportunities for emerging composers in the United States. This year's Underwood Readings were presented in partnership with NYU Steinhardt *Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions*.

Jack Hughes receives the 2019 **Underwood Commission** for a work to be premiered by ACO in a future season while the new **Consortium for Emerging Composers Commission** goes to Jihyun Kim. Aaron Israel Levin receives this year's **Audience Choice Commission**.

“Jack Hughes’ music was inventive and meticulously crafted, with a true flair for orchestral color and dynamism,” says ACO Artistic Director **Derek Bermel**. “We are excited to see what Jack does with this opportunity to write a brand-new work for us.”

Jack Hughes says, “I am ecstatic to be writing a new piece for ACO. Throughout the Underwood New Music Readings, I got to know the orchestra's sound and personality, and I could feel the connection between the players on stage. Working with this ensemble has been a pleasure, and I am so excited to write a piece that makes full use of what these stellar players have to offer.”

The new Consortium Commission for Emerging Composers – which goes to **Jihyun Kim** – was created as a way to involve more orchestras in supporting emerging composers and to embed multiple performances into the opportunity. “While it is common now for established names to receive consortium commissions, composers in earlier stages of their careers do not often get multiple performances for a new orchestral work,” explains ACO President **Ed Yim**. Kim receives a commission to write a new work to be performed by ACO, the Alabama Symphony Orchestra (ASO), and American Youth Symphony (AYS) in Los Angeles.

Carlos Izcaray, Music Director of both ASO and AYS says, “One of the biggest challenges for an emerging composer is getting the opportunity to come back to their pieces, edit them, and hear them again in performance. That is why, as Music Director of both the American Youth Symphony and the Alabama Symphony Orchestra, I’m thrilled to partner with ACO to launch our inaugural co-commissioning group. This will provide an amazing platform for a very talented new voice to be discovered.”

In addition, for the tenth year, audience members at the Underwood New Music Readings had a chance to make their voices heard through the Audience Choice Commission. The selected composer this year is **Aaron Israel Levin**, for his piece *In Between*. As the recipient, Levin also receives a commission from ACO for a composition to be premiered in a future season.

Yim says about the Audience Choice, “I’m delighted that we have begun giving the audience a voice in picking composers with whom ACO will work. There is a crucial energy and balance between listener, performer and composer that should be celebrated, and the Audience Choice commission allows listeners to participate actively in the creation of new musical works. Of course, we feel that all six of the Underwood composers are special and deserve support, but I am not surprised that Aaron’s work had a special place in the hearts of the audience.”

“It was such an incredible and informative experience to take part in the Underwood New Music Readings,” adds Aaron Israel Levin. “I’m honored to have the chance to work with the amazing musicians of ACO once again. Can't wait to get back to work!”

2019 mentor composer **Anthony Cheung** says of the Readings, “I’m rather astonished at how much ground was covered over such a short amount of time, from talking nuts and bolts of a score to various panels on career advice to the readings themselves and feedback. The sessions were a vivid snapshot into the world of orchestral composition in America today, but more importantly, they introduced six distinctive voices whom I’ll look forward to hearing for years to come.”

Jihyun Kim echoes, “The Underwood New Music Readings with ACO provided the best environment for young composers with the orchestra being so fearless and open-minded to new ideas and aesthetics. All three days were filled with valuable learning experiences, inspiring discussions, and the pure joy of sharing music!”

About the Selected Composers and Their Music

2019 Underwood Commission winner **Jack Hughes** (b. 1992) is a Chicago-based composer who is interested in exploring the ways in which the inner life of sound interacts with a listener’s mind, body and soul. He is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Chicago, where he studies with Augusta Read Thomas. He received his Bachelor of Music degree in composition and theory at the Cleveland Institute of Music, in the studio of Keith Fitch. Jack served as composer fellow of San Francisco’s Volti choral ensemble in 2017 and of the Canton Symphony Orchestra

in 2014. His music has also been performed by eighth blackbird, Quator Bozzini and members of Ensemble Dal Niente, among others. He began his musical studies on trumpet and piano in Reston Virginia and has also studied violin and viola with members of The Spektral Quartet in Chicago.

While Jack avoids being prescriptive in the response his music elicits, one of his core values is for his music be meaningful on some level to all audience members, regardless of their musical knowledge. He seeks to foster musical experiences in which imagination, empathy, and trust flow in all directions among the composer, performers, and listeners.

Of his Underwood piece *Needlepoint*, Hughes explains, “This piece was inspired by the craft of needlepoint, in which different-colored yarns are stitched onto a stiff canvas to produce a pattern or image. What inspires me about this art form are the contrasts it contains: between the flexible strands of yarn and the rigid canvas and between the small complex patterns that combine to form larger shapes and images. Throughout the work, small melodic threads are stitched onto a slowly-evolving harmonic grid. Dynamic swells produce rapid changes between the foreground and background, while stark tempo changes create a sense of ebb and flow as the music sometimes surges forward and sometimes seems to be held back against its will.”

The music of 2019 Consortium for Emerging Composers Commission winner **Jihyun Kim** (b.1989) has been performed in the prestigious venues around the world, including Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, the Cloisters at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bruno Walter Auditorium at Lincoln Center, Seiji Ozawa Hall, Harris Hall in Aspen, DiMenna Center, Palazzo Medici Riccardi in Florence Italy, and Seoul Arts Center in Korea. His works have been performed by Tanglewood New Fromm Players, Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, JACK Quartet, PUBLIQuartet, Asciano Quartet, Karien Ensemble, Switch Ensemble, and were featured at Tanglewood Music Center, Aspen Music Festival, Mayfest, the University of South Florida New Music Festival, among others. Recent honors include the American Prize in Orchestral Music, Libby Larsen Prize, Otto R. Stahl Memorial Award, PUBLIQ Access, Florence String Quartet Call for Scores, Juventas Ensemble Call for Scores, RedNote New Music Composition Competition, among many others. Jihyun is currently pursuing DMA in Composition at Cornell University as a Sage Fellowship recipient. Jihyun previously earned MM degree in Composition from the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University while serving as an Associate Instructor in Music Theory, and BM degree in Composition from Yonsei University in Seoul, Korea.

Of her Underwood work *A Tramp in the Assembly Line*, Kim notes, “The movie, *Modern Times* (1936), is a comedy film written and directed by Charlie Chaplin. The “Tramp” character struggles to survive in the modern, industrialized world. My intention is not about conveying the message of *Modern Times*. Rather, I wanted to depict the scenes that were left with me with strong impressions: the rotating motion of the conveyor belt; the regular-pulsed machinery sound from the factory; the clown-like walking gesture of the character “Tramp”; and black-and-white scenes without sound. I wanted to create a musical panorama - enumerating it with equal importance and independence, instead of a single plot with a logical flow. As the musical ideas shift from one to another, a sense of discontinuity can be found between the sections.”

2019 Audience Choice Commission winner **Aaron Israel Levin** (b. 1995) writes music that is guided by the emotional dynamism of storytelling and drama. He draws from a variety of musical and non-musical influences – including film, theater, and performance art – to create compositions that are both personal and wide-ranging. Aaron’s music has been performed by the Bent Frequency Duo, Fifth House Ensemble, loadbang, Pavia Winds, the Yale Philharmonia, mezzo-sopranos Kayleigh Butcher and Lisa Neher, and percussionists Dmitrii Nilov and Sam Um. Passionate about collaboration, Aaron frequently works with artists from different mediums. He has collaborated with playwright Christopher Gabriel Nuñez; developed projects with projection designer Johnny Moreno; and choreographers Celeste Miller and Mary Gwin. Originally from St. Paul, Minnesota, Aaron earned his BA in music from Grinnell College in Iowa, where he studied composition with Eric McIntyre and John Rommereim. He will receive his MM in composition from the Yale School of Music in May 2019, where his teachers included Martin Bresnick, Aaron Jay Kernis, David Lang, Hannah Lash, and Christopher Theofanidis.

Of his Underwood piece, Levin says, “*In Between* takes its inspiration from movies about making movies, like David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive*, or Federico Fellini’s *8 ½*. In these films, the lives of fictitious filmmakers ‘off-set’ often become intermingled with the film they’re attempting to make. *In Between* takes this premise as a jumping-off point,

and approaches the orchestra like a crew of filmmakers. Specifically, the whip – a percussion instrument that makes a distinctive *whack* – stands in for the director’s clapperboard. Every time the whip is sounded, it signifies an ‘action’ for the filming to begin, or a ‘cut’ for the filming to stop. The musical characters that take place during the ‘action’ and ‘cut’ sequences come into conflict with each other, evoking the tension and inner turmoil that frequently accompany the artistic process. The title refers to what happens in between ‘takes,’ and the inevitable merging of off- and on-set.”

About the Underwood New Music Readings

The 28th Annual Underwood New Music Readings were under the direction of ACO’s Artistic Director, composer **Derek Bermel**, and were conducted by **Ludovic Morlot**, with **Bermel**, **Anthony Cheung**, and **Tania León** as mentor composers. 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 Career Development Workshops with industry professionals. This year's New Music Readings attracted over 200 submissions from emerging composers around the country.

The Underwood Commission was chosen by the mentor composers and the conductor. The Consortium Commission was chosen by ACO Artistic Director Derek Bermel and Alabama Symphony Orchestra/American Youth Symphony music director Carlos Izcaray. The Audience Choice Commission was determined by paper ballot at the run-through performance.

For over a generation, **ACO's Underwood New Music Readings** have provided all-important career development and public exposure to the country's most promising emerging composers, with over 150 composers participating. Readings alumni have won every major composition award, including the Pulitzer, Grammy, Grawemeyer, American Academy of Arts & Letters, and Rome Prizes. Orchestras around the globe have commissioned ACO Readings alumni.

The New Music Readings have launched many of today's top composers, such as ACO’s own Artistic Director **Derek Bermel**, **Lisa Bielawa**, **Anthony Cheung**, **Anna Clyne**, **Cindy Cox**, **Sebastian Currier**, **Jennifer Higdon**, **Pierre Jalbert**, **Aaron Jay Kernis**, **Hannah Lash**, **Carter Pann**, **P.Q. Phan**, **Tobias Picker**, **Narong Prangcharoen**, **Paola Prestini**, **Daniel Bernard Roumain**, **Huang Ruo**, **Eric Samuelson**, **Carlos Sanchez-Guiterrez**, **Kate Soper**, **Gregory Spears**, **Joan Tower**, **Ken Ueno**, **Dan Visconti**, **Wang Jie**, **Dalit Warshaw**, **Randall Woolf**, **Nina Young**, and **Roger Zare**.

In addition to Jack Hughes, Aaron Israel Levin, and Jihyun Kim, the 2019 Underwood New Music Readings participants were:

Rodrigo A. Castro (b. 1985) (*La gaviota - Essay No. 1 for Orchestra*)

Rodrigo Castro’s work is a counterpoint of ideas laid out in mosaic, fractal, and dendrite forms. Imbued with an esoteric spirit, the organic cell-driven structures that he creates in every piece project atmospheres where spectral and playful echoes are chanted in a shifting sense of time. As a troubadour of his own time, he uses the orchestra to redefine the vernacular melodies and rhythms of his Mexican and Cuban heritage. Rodrigo’s work is influenced by artists such as Silvio Rodríguez, Bob Dylan, Luis Eduardo Aute and Leonard Cohen. His craft has also been guided and informed by his mentors Leonardo Balada and Leo Brouwer and his most profound inspirations have come to him by way of Jean Sibelius, Alfred Schnittke, and Mikis Theodorakis. Rodrigo is always eager to bring the textures of his compositions to all who venture to hear the voice of his hands in a dialectal exchange that transforms musician and audience.

Chen Yihan (b. 1994) (*Spiritus*)

Much of Chen Yihan’s music seeks for a convergence of different points in time and space, connecting the past to the future and bringing different corners of the world together in an abstract, poetic, and emotional way that transcends culture and epoch.

Chen Yihan's music has been performed by the Symphony Orchestra of the National Opera House (China), The Juilliard Orchestra, Longcheng Symphony Orchestra, The New York Virtuoso Singers, Cantoría Hong Kong, the Entre Madeiras Trio, among others. He has earned honors such as two ASCAP Foundation Morton Gould Young Composer Awards, the Jacobs School of Music Dean's Prize, a winner of the Juilliard orchestra competition, to name a few. As a pianist, Chen Yihan has received recognitions such as being the Grand Prize winner of the Cincinnati World Piano Competition, the winner of the New World Youth Symphony Orchestra Young Artist Competition, etc. Chen Yihan is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in composition at Princeton University and holds a master's degree in composition from the Juilliard School and bachelor's degrees in composition and piano from the Jacobs School of Music, having studied with Samuel Adler, Claude Baker, Arnaldo Cohen, Don Freund, P.Q. Phan, Christopher Rouse, and Sven-David Sandström, Aaron Travers, among others.

inti figgis-vizueta (b. 1993) (*Symphony for the Body*)

inti figgis-vizueta (they/them) is a queer Andinx experimental composer based in Brooklyn, NY. They write identity-focused musics, often channeling story-telling and the manifestation of non-hegemonic voices in concert spaces. inti works to create transparent, self-contained musical processes through which melodic and timbral interaction blooms and consumes itself. inti studied with Felipe Lara. inti has received numerous awards, most recently the 2019 Hildegard Competition from National Sawdust and the 2019 Mizzou International Composer's Festival featuring Alarm Will Sound. They've won calls for scores for organizations such as Verdant Vibes, N/A Ensemble, UnTwelve, Baltimore Choral Arts, and 113 Collective. Their music has also been played by ensembles such as loadbang, PUBLIQuartet, Hypercube, RTE Contempo String Quartet, and Balance Campaign as well as the Shenandoah Valley Youth Orchestra and SJSU Wind Ensemble. When not composing, inti works as the Director of Inclusion at the Boulanger Initiative and as a curator for Score Follower.

About American Composers Orchestra

Founded in 1977, American Composers Orchestra is dedicated to the creation, performance, preservation, and promotion 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. ACO programs seek to innovate and experiment, educate students and the public, and open the orchestra to diverse new influences and audiences. For more information, visit www.americancomposers.org.

About NYU Steinhardt

The NYU Steinhardt *Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions*, established in 1925, serves as the university's 'School of Music.' It has since developed into a major research and practice center in music technology, music composition, music business, film scoring, songwriting, music performance practices, performing arts therapies, and the performing arts-in-education (music, dance, and drama). 1,600 students major in renowned music and performing arts programs, guided by a faculty of over 450. The degree programs - baccalaureate through Ph.D. - share Steinhardt's entrepreneurial spirit that encourages innovation and the pursuit of high artistic and academic goals. The Department's expertise and diverse interests spark the collaborations that bring performers and composers together with technologists, business entrepreneurs, arts managers, filmmakers, choreographers, actors, librettists and educators – often reviewed by the New York and national media. Faculty sit on leading journal editorial boards and publish some of today's most significant performing arts and technology research.

Alumni have moved on to major performing and composing careers, and serve in coveted positions within the music and performing arts industry. They form the faculties and administrative positions in colleges, conservatories, and universities throughout the world. Celebrated graduates include jazz great Wayne Shorter, multiple Tony award winning music theatre composer Cy Coleman and lyricist Betty Comden, multiple Oscar winning film composer

Elmer Bernstein, conductor/composer Tania León, music technologist Enoch Light, and Tony Award, Oscar and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and screenwriter John Patrick Shanley.

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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