



SFCM and UCSF Explore Variation through Science and Music

– Art Reflects Life: Mutations, Variations, and Improvisation – **Bringing musicians and neuroscientists together on October 14**

Leading UCSF neuroscientists and SFCM musicians share the Hume Concert Hall stage on Wednesday, October 14, for an evening of live music and brain science exploring how change — in our genes, our brains, and our music — sparks both innovation and vulnerability

SAN FRANCISCO, CA. October 01, 2026 — What does variation make possible? In music, a theme can be transformed, reinterpreted, or developed into something new. In biology, genetic variation drives evolution, creating new possibilities as well as vulnerabilities.

On Wednesday, October 14, 2026, at 7:30 p.m., the **San Francisco Conservatory of Music (SFCM)** and the **UCSF Edward and Pearl Fein Memory and Aging Center**, together with the **Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI)**, present ***Art Reflects Life: Mutations, Variations, and Improvisation*** at SFCM's Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall. The 90-minute program pairs talks from four UCSF physician-scientists with live performances and musical demonstrations led by SFCM jazz and orchestra faculty.

Through the evening's live performances, visual demonstrations, and conversations, UCSF scientists will examine how genetic variation contributes to evolution, human development and neurological disease, while SFCM musicians explore how music develops through variation, from structured composition to improvisation.

Rather than suggesting that biological mutation and musical variation operate in the same way, the evening puts the two perspectives in conversation. How can variation create something new while retaining what came before? When can a small change alter a larger system? How do structure and variation interact? And where do the parallels between music and biology reveal something unexpected—and where do they break down?

The program will draw on different approaches to musical variation, including composed works and improvisation, alongside discussions of evolution, genetics and the human brain. Musical examples will demonstrate how altering rhythm, harmony, phrasing or other elements can transform musical material while preserving a connection to its source. Improvisation offers another form of variation, as musicians listen, respond and adapt to one another in real time. Repertoire to be announced.

Throughout the evening, music and neuroscience come together to explore the possibilities and consequences of variation, from the genetic changes that have shaped human evolution to musical ideas that are transformed through composition and improvisation. The scientific discussion will examine

variants associated with neurological disease and how tools such as CRISPR are helping researchers study genetic changes and explore ways to address their effects.

The program will also explore connections among evolution, social behavior and vulnerability. Scientists will examine brain systems involved in complex social behavior and consider how adaptations that contribute to human capacities may also be associated with particular vulnerabilities. Musicians will approach connection from a different direction, demonstrating how performers listen, anticipate and respond to one another, creating music collectively.

Participating UCSF physician-scientists include Bruce Miller, MD, director of the UCSF Edward and Pearl Fein Memory and Aging Center and founding director of GBHI; Aimee Kao, MD, PhD, professor of neurology at UCSF; Claire Clelland, MD, PhD, associate professor of neurology at UCSF; and William Seeley, MD, professor of neurology and pathology at UCSF and founding director of the UCSF Neurodegenerative Disease Brain Bank.

SFCM participants include Jason Hainsworth, associate dean of community development and executive director of Roots, Jazz, and American Music, and Edwin Outwater, music director of the SFCM Orchestra, together with SFCM musicians. David Stull will host and moderate the program.

“Variation has helped shape the human brain and the capacities that define so much of human life — language, creativity, music, and social connection,” said Dr. Miller. “The complexity that makes these capacities possible can also create vulnerability. Music offers a fascinating counterpoint: another complex system in which variation can preserve what came before while opening the door to something new.”

Art Reflects Life continues a collaboration among SFCM, the UCSF Fein Memory and Aging Center, and GBHI that began in 2019. Through public talks and performances, the series brings scientists and musicians together to explore brain health through the complementary perspectives of neuroscience and music. Previous programs have addressed functional brain networks, language, creativity, emotion, empathy, dyslexia, improvisation, resilience, jazz and equity.

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Event Details

Art Reflects Life: Mutations, Variations, and Improvisation

Date: Wednesday, October 14, 2026

When: 7:00 p.m. doors open

Where: Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall

San Francisco Conservatory of Music

50 Oak Street, San Francisco

Approximately 90 minutes

Tickets: sfcmlive.org/experience/performances/partnership-ucsf-event/20261014

More information: memory.ucsf.edu/sfcmlive

About the San Francisco Conservatory of Music

Founded on the belief that the study of music at its highest level provides a foundation for a life of purpose and satisfaction, SFCM is a vibrant community of artists, educators, and students committed to excellence and innovation. The Conservatory's faculty includes leaders from the world's premier ensembles, ensuring that each student receives practical training, professional mentorship, and the inspiration to shape the future of music. For more information, please visit sfcmmusic.org

About the UCSF Edward and Pearl Fein Memory and Aging Center

The UCSF Edward and Pearl Fein Memory and Aging Center, part of the UCSF Weill Institute for Neurosciences, is a multidisciplinary center dedicated to understanding healthy brain aging and neurodegenerative diseases. The center brings together experts in neurology, neuropsychology, neuroscience, genetics, imaging, and other fields to improve diagnosis and care and to develop new approaches to prevention and treatment. Its clinicians and researchers study conditions including Alzheimer's disease, frontotemporal dementia, and related disorders while working to translate scientific discoveries into better outcomes for patients and families. Learn more at memory.ucsf.edu

About the Global Brain Health Institute at UCSF

The Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI) at UCSF advances brain health equity through education, research, advocacy, and collaboration. Based at the UCSF Edward and Pearl Fein Memory and Aging Center, GBHI at UCSF brings together professionals from diverse fields through the Atlantic Fellows for Equity in Brain Health program. Fellows draw on clinical and research expertise, mentorship, leadership development, and a global network to improve brain health in their communities and around the world. Learn more at memory.ucsf.edu/gbhi



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