



**SFCM**

SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

# **David Garner, *composition***

## **Faculty Artist Series**

Friday, March 24, 2023, 7:30 PM

Barbro Osher Recital Hall

with

**Del Sol Quartet**

**Christine Abraham**, *mezzo-soprano*

**Dale Tsang**, *piano*

String Quartet No. 2 (2014)

David Garner

I. Vivace

(b. 1954)

II. Adagio ed Ondulato

III. Vivace leggiero

IV. Spirito

**Del Sol Quartet**

Benjamin Kreith and Hyeyung Sol Yoon, *violins*

Charlton Lee, *viola*

Kathryn Bates, *cello*

**- Intermission -**

*Spoon River Songs* (1987–2010)

D. Garner

Prologue

Poetry by Edgar Lee Masters

1. Fiddler Jones

(1868–1950)

2. Charles Webster

3. Mrs. Kessler

4. William and Emily

5. Hortense Robbins

6. George Gray

7. Lucinda Matlock

Christine Abraham, *mezzo-soprano*

Dale Tsang, *piano*

*Cameras, recording equipment, food and drink are not permitted in Conservatory performance halls.*

*Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic equipment before the performance begins.*

# Artist Profiles

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Fascinated by the feedback loop between social change, technology, and artistic innovation, the San Francisco-based **Del Sol Quartet** is a leading force in 21st-century chamber music. They believe that live music can, and should, happen anywhere – whether introducing Ben Johnston’s microtonal Americana at the Library of Congress or in a canyon cave, taking Aeryn Santillan’s gun-violence memorial to the streets of the Mission District, or collaborating with Huang Ruo and the anonymous Chinese poets who carved their words into the walls of the Angel Island Immigration Station.

Since 1992, Del Sol has commissioned or premiered thousands of works by composers including Terry Riley, Gabriela Lena Frank, Tania León, Frederic Rzewski, Vijay Iyer, Mason Bates, Michael Harrison, Huang Ruo, Pamela Z, Chinary Ung, Chen Yi, Erberk Eryilmaz, Theresa Wong, Reza Vali, and Kui Dong. The quartet regularly works with composers through workshops, universities, as well as Del Sol commissioning and incubator programs. They especially value their ongoing relationship with the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music in Boonville, CA.

Del Sol’s GRAMMY-winning eleventh album “A Dust in Time” debuted at #3 on Billboard in October 2021. Called “excavations of beauty from the elemental” (NY Times), this hour-long meditation was released in the form of a coloring book. Del Sol is a current artist on the ImmerSphere roster, a groundbreaking platform that produces performances in augmented reality.

[@delsolquartet](http://www.delsolquartet.com)

Performing a varied repertoire to great acclaim, mezzo-soprano **Christine Abraham** has been declared “radiant” by the *Los Angeles Times* and “glamorous and melting of voice” by the *Wall Street Journal*. She has performed roles with the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Santa Fe Opera, Bard Festival, Boston Lyric Opera, and Spoleto Festival USA, and has appeared

# Artist Profiles

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as a featured soloist with the orchestras of Philadelphia, San Francisco, Dallas, and St. Louis, as well as Boston Baroque, Chicago's Music of the Baroque, the Toronto Consort, and many others. An advocate of contemporary works, Ms. Abraham has frequently premiered new works by composers such as Tan Dun, James MacMillan, Tod Machover, Peter Lieberson, Paul Moravec, Stephen Hartke, and David Carlson, and can be heard on recordings on Signum Classics, Naxos American Classics, BIS Music, Arabesque Recordings, and BBC Music.

Ms. Abraham maintains a private teaching studio and serves on the collegiate faculty of California State University East Bay and the Pre-College and Continuing Education faculty at San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she is also an alumna. When not making music, her favorite thing is to be outdoors – hiking, camping, walking the dog, or just enjoying the light of the morning in her own backyard with a strong cup of coffee in hand.

Pianist **Dale Tsang** earned her BM in piano performance from the University of Southern California, her MM from the University of Michigan, and her DMA from Rice University. Dale is a faculty member at Laney College, teaches an inspiring assortment of adult students, and serves as a competition adjudicator for many local and statewide piano competitions.

A winner of numerous competitions and an active solo and chamber musician, Dale frequently performs locally and in Europe and Asia. As a core member of Ensemble for These Times (E4TT), she has championed 20th and 21st century music and collaborated in many commissions, premieres, and international performances. Her collaborative work on E4TT recordings resulted in a 2016 Silver Medal and a 2018 Gold Medal from the Global Music Awards. She continues enthusiastically to disseminate the music of living composers. Dale is married to her best friend and favorite composer David Garner and is a mother of two wonderful college kids.

# Artist Profiles

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Drawing from classical, neoclassical, jazz, rock, blues, and non-Western traditions, the music of composer **David Garner** (b. 1954) reflects a unique blend of musical genres. An alumnus and full professor at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Garner has taught composition, chamber music, music literature, and music theory there since 1979. In 2007 he co-founded the award-winning Ensemble for These Times, which continues to gain recognition for innovative and original programming and recording. Trained as a pianist and cellist, he has performed on both the solo classical concert stage and in various jazz/rock fusion and blues bands. A composition autodidact, Garner won the 2014 and 2015 American Prize in Composition, and in 2023 was awarded the prestigious Hoefer Prize. His recorded works have won several Global Music Awards. Garner's works are recorded on Pentatone and Centaur Records and are featured online at 3232 Music. Numerous live performances of his works are available on YouTube.

# Program Notes

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**String Quartet No. 2** was commissioned for the 2014 Shanghai–San Francisco International Chamber Music Festival, and dedicated to the Han Quartet, who premiered the work. The quartet is in four movements, about 23 minutes in duration. The fourth movement follows the third without a break.

How is new music like peanut butter? Most people find that new works for the concert stage sound either “crunchy” or “smooth”. These qualities are a result of the amount of perceived dissonance present in the musical language. This quartet is on the crunchier side – in fact, it is just about the crunchiest work I’ve composed to date. Up until the concept for this piece, I wrote music that listeners considered smooth, or perhaps moderately crunchy. But at the time I was offered the commission for this quartet, I felt it was time to search for a more crunchy brand to add to my pantry.

*(GEEK ALERT No. 1: In the second decade of this century, composers from the Shanghai Conservatory were favoring strict “serial” or post-modern styles of music. Classical “serial” technique, or “free-tonal” technique, was invented by Arnold Schoenberg in the early 1900’s and is about as crunchy as you can get. It is partially responsible for the stigma attached to “new music”. Between wanting to honor and respect this style of writing and wanting to break out of my perceived rut, I developed a partner technique which I call “tonal serialism”).*

To resume: The first movement is a Sonata Allegro built on three themes: the principal theme is dynamic with sudden bursts of unison gestures. The subsidiary theme is lyric, a melody introduced by the viola with pizzicato accompaniment. The third (“closing”) theme is easily recognized by the cellist’s rhythmic rapping on the belly of the instrument. The exposition (the first part of the movement) is repeated: This is an old tradition, and not followed 100% of the time, but in this case I thought listeners might appreciate a second chance at familiarizing themselves with the crunchiness.

The second, “slow” movement is marked *Adagio ed Ondulato*, which means “slow and undulating”. This foggy, indistinct atmosphere is broken by a couple of variations on a Chinese popular song, *Kangding Qingge*,

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which I added in homage to the spirit of the festival for which the quartet was composed, and as a hopefully welcome release from the surrounding dissonant and murky character. (*GEEK ALERT No. 2: I systematically subtracted seven pitches from the twelve tones of the row, superimposed two trichords (three-pitch fragments) to create the pentatonic tonality needed for the folksong. The serial writing is temporarily ‘suspended,’ and then subtly reintroduced by the cello, carefully ‘picking up’ the row from where it left off before the song.*)

The third movement is a scherzo, with a characteristic two-against-three Venezuelan waltz rhythm. This whimsical waltz completely disintegrates into halting gestures and pizzicatos before returning innocently, as if nothing has happened. (*GEEK ALERT No. 3: I can thank the actor Carel Struycken – who, among many other roles, played Lurch in the early Addams Family movies – for this specific waltz genre. I asked him about a piece his character Fidel played on a toy piano at the very end of the film “The Witches of Eastwick”. He very kindly wrote back and said that he had improvised the piece, and that it was a sort of Venezuelan waltz.*)

The fourth movement immediately follows the third without a break. It's fast, with interlocking Latin American-derived rhythms. An insistent cello line provides the “backbone” of this layering. The movement recombines elements from other movements, occasionally bending the original tone row into some Jazz harmonies, and ends with a characteristically big finish.

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At its completion in 2010, *Spoon River Songs* was a 23-year-old work-in-progress. The first two songs to be written, Fiddler Jones and Lucinda Matlock, were commissioned by Dr. Nikki Martin in 1987 and premiered at CAMI Hall in New York by San Francisco Conservatory students in 1988. Mezzo-soprano Katherine Growdon commissioned Charles Webster in 2004. That set of three is what Susanne Mentzer recorded in 2006 for my CD of vocal music, “Phenomenon”. After the recording sessions, she asked me to add more songs to the cycle. I chose to set an additional four and added a prologue with an excerpted fifth poem. The cycle was premiered and recorded by Catherine Cook and pianist Kristin Pankonin in 2010. During rehearsals for the premiere, Cathy and Kristin asked me to insert the short piano interlude after the fourth poem, William and Emily, as a vocal rest for the singer and a bit of emotional recovery time for both performers.

Edgar Lee Masters (1868–1950) was an attorney born and bred in the American Midwest. He was a prolific poet, novelist, and playwright. His best-known work is the *Spoon River Anthology*, a collection of no less than 245 poems loosely based on his childhood in western Illinois. He conceived each of the poems as an epitaph on a headstone, the departed speaking about their life from beyond the grave. Some of the eponymous characters were based on real people from Masters’ early years, but many others are clearly archetypal, like Fiddler Jones and Lucinda Matlock. The poems are true masterworks, vividly and heartbreakingly presenting the entire gamut and ethos of the turn of the 20th century in the American Midwest. Within the collection one can practically smell the hay, the flowers, the cooking, see the rain and stars, hear the river, and feel the joy, sorrow, pride, regret – and everything else that defines the human experience. I particularly relate to these poems having spent my early childhood in Nebraska.

- David Garner, March 24, 2023

# Texts

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## ***Spoon River Songs***

from *The Spoon River Anthology* by Edgar Lee Masters ©1914

### **Prologue (from Edith Conant)**

We stand about this place—we, the memories;[...]  
And all things are changed.  
And we—we, the memories, stand here for ourselves alone,  
For no eye marks us, or would know why we are here.  
Your husband is dead, your sister lives far away,  
Your father is bent with age;  
He has forgotten you, he scarcely leaves the house  
Any more.  
No one remembers your exquisite face,  
Your lyric voice! [...]  
It is all forgotten, save by us, the memories,  
Who are forgotten by the world.  
All is changed, [...].  
Only the burning sun and the quiet stars are the same.  
And we—we, the memories, stand here in awe,  
Our eyes closed with the weariness of tears—  
In immeasurable weariness

### **1. Fiddler Jones**

The earth keeps some vibration going  
There in your heart, and that is you.  
And if the people find you can fiddle,  
Why fiddle you must for all your life.  
What do you see, a harvest of clover?  
Or a meadow to walk through to the river?  
The wind's in the corn; you rub your hands  
For beebes hereafter ready for market;  
Or else you hear the rustle of skirts  
Like the girls when dancing at Little Grove.  
To Cooney Potter a pillar of dust  
Or whirling leaves meant ruinous drought;  
They looked to me like Red-Head Sammy  
Stepping it off to "Toor-a-loor".



# Texts

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How could I till my forty acres  
Not to mention getting more,  
With a medley of horns, bassoons and piccolos  
Stirred in my brain by crows and robins  
And the creak of a windmill, only these?  
And I never started to plow in my life  
That someone did not stop in the road  
And take me away to a dance or picnic.  
I ended up with forty acres,  
I ended up with a broken fiddle,  
And a broken laugh, and a thousand memories,  
And not a single regret.

## 2. Charles Webster

The pine woods on the hill,  
And the farmhouse miles away,  
Showed clear as though behind a lens  
Under a sky of peacock blue!  
But a blanket of cloud by afternoon  
Muffled the earth. And you walked the road  
And the clover field, where the only sound  
Was the cricket's liquid tremolo.  
Then the sun went down between great drifts  
Of distant storms. For a rising wind  
Swept clean the sky and blew the flames  
Of the unprotected stars  
And swayed the russet moon,  
Hanging between the rim of the hill  
And the twinkling boughs of the apple orchard  
You walked the shore in thought  
Where the throats of the waves were like whip-poor-wills  
Singing beneath the water and crying  
To the wash of the wind in the cedar trees,  
Till you stood, too full for tears, by the cot,  
And looking up saw Jupiter,  
Tipping the spire of the giant pine,  
And looking down saw my vacant chair,  
Rocked by the wind on the lonely porch—  
Be brave, Beloved!

# Texts

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## 3. Mrs. Kessler

Mr. Kessler, you know, was in the army,  
And he drew six dollars a month as a pension,  
And stood on the corner talking politics,  
Or sat at home reading Grant's Memoirs;  
And I supported the family by washing,  
Learning the secrets of all the people  
From their curtains, counterpanes, shirts and skirts.  
For things that are new grow old at length,  
They're replaced with better or none at all:  
People are prospering or falling back.  
And rents and patches widen with time;  
No thread or needle can pace decay,  
And there are stains that baffle soap,  
And there are colors that run in spite of you,  
Blamed though you are for spoiling a dress.  
Handkerchiefs, napery, have their secrets—  
The laundress, Life, knows all about it.  
And I, who went to all the funerals  
Held in Spoon River, swear I never  
Saw a dead face without thinking it looked  
Like something washed and ironed.

## 4. William and Emily

There is something about Death  
Like love itself!  
If with some one with whom you have known passion  
And the glow of youthful love,  
You also, after years of life  
Together, feel the sinking of the fire  
And thus fade away together,  
Gradually, faintly, delicately,  
As it were in each other's arms,  
Passing from the familiar room—  
That is a power of unison between souls  
Like love itself!

# Texts

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## 5. Hortense Robbins

My name used to be in the papers daily  
As having dined somewhere,  
Or traveled somewhere,  
Or rented a house in Paris,  
Where I entertained the nobility.  
I was forever eating or traveling,  
Or taking the cure at Baden-Baden.  
Now I am here to do honor  
To Spoon River, here beside the family whence I sprang.  
No one cares now where I dined,  
Or lived, or whom I entertained,  
Or how often I took the cure at Baden-Baden!

## 6. George Gray

I have studied many times  
The marble which was chiseled for me—  
A boat with a furled sail at rest in a harbor.  
In truth it pictures not my destination  
But my life.  
For love was offered me and I shrank from its disillusionment;  
Sorrow knocked at my door, but I was afraid;  
Ambition called to me, but I dreaded the chances.  
Yet all the while I hungered for meaning in my life.  
And now I know that we must lift the sail  
And catch the winds of destiny  
Wherever they drive the boat.  
To put meaning in one's life may end in madness,  
But life without meaning is the torture  
Of restlessness and vague desire—  
It is a boat longing for the sea and yet afraid.

## 7. Lucinda Matlock

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,  
And played snap-out at Winchester  
One time we changed partners,  
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,

# Texts

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And then I found Davis.  
We were married and lived together for seventy years,  
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,  
Eight of whom we lost  
Ere I reached the age of sixty.  
I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick,  
I made the garden, and for holiday  
Rambled over the hills where sang the larks,  
And by Spoon River, gathering many a shell,  
And many a flower, and medicinal weed  
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys!  
At ninety six I had lived enough, that is all,  
And passed to a sweet repose.  
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,  
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?  
Degenerate sons and daughters,  
Life is too strong for you!  
It takes life to love life.

## **Acknowledgements**

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