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2026-27
SEASON

CONCERT SERIES



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CLEVELAND
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NEW MUSIC SERIES

Keith Fitch, director

Sunday, October 11, 2026

4pm | Mixon Hall

New Music Ensemble

Keith Fitch, director

Melinda Wagner, guest composer

Kulas Foundation Visiting Artist

Sheila Browne, viola

New Music Ensemble is generously supported by the Roy Minoff Family Fund.

Melinda Wagner
(b. 1957)

Scratch (2009)

Erin Yun, oboe

Sean Ellis, violin

Sue Kim, violin

Victoria Goettel, viola

Spencer Adler, cello

Morton Feldman
(1926–1987)

The Viola in My Life I (1970)

*Performed in celebration of the composer's
centennial*

Sheila Browne, viola

Jonah Miller, flute

Sue Kim, violin

Asim Kapoor, cello

Annie Qin, piano

Jay Walton, percussion

Nathaniel Hill, conductor

Melinda Wagner

Wood-Sprite (2025)

Fiona Khuong-Huu, violin

Intermission

Morton Feldman

The Viola in My Life 2 (1970)

*Performed in celebration of the composer's
centennial*

Sheila Browne, viola

Jonah Miller, flute

David Chang, clarinet

Sue Kim, violin

Asim Kapoor, cello

Annie Qin, celesta

Jay Walton, percussion

Dean Buck, conductor

Melinda Wagner

Elegy Flywheel (2020)

David Chang, clarinet

Sean Ellis, violin

Spencer Adler, cello

Wyatt Knutson, double bass

Ka Yiu Avis Yan, piano

Daniel Kinney, percussion

Dean Buck, conductor

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Scratch

Melinda Wagner

In the hands of a fine player, the oboe is so agile — yet, it is also capable of producing sustained lines of melancholic beauty. I wanted to showcase these attributes. The resulting piece is certainly a vehicle for virtuosic oboe playing, while being no less tricky for the strings!

The piece consists of a series of episodes — skittering, playful, sometimes agitated rhythmic passages sharply contrasted with scarily slow chorale textures. While the piece is sectional in this way, I tried to maintain a kind of narrative throughout. That is, I wanted to place the building blocks of contrasting textures securely within the context of my own developmental style. And I wanted each of the five parts to “fit” and work together, as if slipping into the fingers of a glove.

— Melinda Wagner

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The Viola in My Life I and 2

Morton Feldman

The cycle *The Viola in My Life* was begun in July 1970 in Honolulu (composed especially for Karen Phillips, resident performer at Hawaii University) and consists of individual compositions utilizing various instrumental combinations with the viola.

“The compositional format is quite simple. Unlike most of my music, the complete cycle of *The Viola in My Life* (I-IV) is conventionally notated as regards pitches and tempi. I needed the exact time proportions underlying the gradual and slight crescendo characteristic of all the muted sounds the viola plays. It was this aspect that determined the rhythmic sequence of events.” (Feldman)

The attention demanded by Feldman’s music — so soft that it can almost not be heard — is so uniform that it suggests the idea of a surface. We are never quite sure where the sounds are coming from. Time, articulated in most music by rhythm, is perceived as being static. Each sound floats in space, is entirely independent of what has gone before and what has yet to come. Sounds do not progress but merely accumulate in the same place.

The Viola in My Life is a gorgeous succession of delicate sounds in which Feldman, through the interaction of sound and silence, conjures up a desolate magic on a plane where time is somehow altered, transformed.

— *program note courtesy of Universal Edition*

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Wood-Sprite

Melinda Wagner

The wood sprite — a mythical, fairy-like being — appears in folklore as a diminutive guardian of the forest, often watching over a single tree. Sometimes mischievous, sometimes gentle, these creatures may serve as playful tricksters or benevolent stewards of the natural world and its wanderers.

I was drawn to this image not only by memories of a childhood spent near a beloved woodland, but also by the nature of the violin itself — an instrument born of the forest, crafted from maple, spruce, and ebony. Who's to say a wood sprite doesn't dwell within the wood it came from?

This piece invites the performer to embrace — and perhaps even exaggerate — its mercurial character: lyrical lines laced with quicksilver gestures, sudden shifts in tone and color, bold dynamic contrasts, and unexpected changes in tempo. Let your instrument channel the elusive spirit of the wood sprite.

Perhaps the violin is the sprite. Or perhaps — just perhaps — one lives inside it.

— *Melinda Wagner*

~ ~ ~

Elegy Flywheel

Melinda Wagner

Many composers find the task of starting a new piece — of confronting the empty page — to be quite stressful, even terrifying. I often find the first few days (or weeks) to be the most arduous, maddeningly slow part of the process of composing. I long ago discovered, however, that composing a simple melody *first* — a kind of ice-breaker — can provide a gateway into the body of the work. Sometimes such a melody is no longer useful once I've learned what the music wants to

do, and it's put on the shelf for another day. But in the case of *Elegy Flywheel*, my rather melancholic melody survived, and I realized, midstream, that its sadness reflected my own feelings after the death of my colleague, Christopher Rouse, in 2019.

Rather than lingering in this mood for very long, the piece quickly turns on its heels, shifting its momentum with music that is mischievous, playful, and mercurial. It is perhaps *this* music that offers the more fitting tribute for a composer who visited Disney World a total of 48 times!

I am deeply indebted to the New York Philharmonic for inviting me to compose this music, and to its incomparable players, who brought it to life.

— Melinda Wagner

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ABOUT THE COMPOSERS

Celebrated as an “...eloquent, poetic voice in contemporary music...” (*American Record Guide*), **Melinda Wagner**’s esteemed catalog of works embodies music of exceptional beauty, power, and intelligence. Wagner received widespread attention when her colorful *Concerto for Flute, Strings and Percussion* earned her the Pulitzer Prize in 1999. Since then, major works have included *Concerto for Trombone*, for Joseph Alessi and the New York Philharmonic; a piano concerto, *Extremity of Sky*, commissioned by the Chicago Symphony for Emanuel Ax; and *Little Moonhead*, composed for the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, as part of its popular “New Brandenburgs” project.

Noted for its “...prismatic colors and...lithe sense of mystery...” (*Washington Post*), *Extremity of Sky* has been performed by Emanuel Ax with the National Symphony (on tour), the Toronto and Kansas City symphonies, and the Staatskapelle Berlin.

Championed early on by Daniel Barenboim, Wagner has received three commissions from the Chicago Symphony; the most recent of these, *Proceed, Moon*, was premiered under the baton of Susanna Mälkki in 2017. Other recent performances have come from The Philadelphia Orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, United States Marine Band, BMOP, American Brass Quintet, Emphyrean Ensemble, and Philadelphia Chamber Music Society.

Among honors Wagner has received is a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship and awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and ASCAP. Wagner was given an honorary doctorate from Hamilton College and a Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Pennsylvania in 2003. Wagner was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2017.

A passionate and inspiring teacher, Wagner has given masterclasses at many fine institutions across the United States, including Harvard, Yale, Eastman, Juilliard, and UC Davis. She has held faculty positions at Brandeis University and Smith College and has served as a mentor at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, Atlantic Music Festival, and Yellow Barn. Wagner currently serves on the faculty of The Juilliard School of Music.

Morton Feldman was born in New York in 1926 and died there in 1987. Just like Cage, a close friend, he was an American composer — an American artist — an American in the true sense of the word.

He identified himself by differentiating his views on composition from those of his colleagues in Europe. He was proud to be an American because he was convinced that it enabled him the freedom, unparalleled in Europe, to work unfettered by tradition. And, he was an American also in what may have been a slight inferiority complex in the face of cultural traditions in Europe, something he proudly rejected and secretly admired.

Like any true artist, Feldman was endowed with a sensitivity for impressions of a wide variety of sources, literature and painting in particular. His affinity to Samuel Beckett has enriched music literature by a unique music theatre piece, *Neither*, and two ensemble works. His friendship with abstract expressionist painters gave birth to a range of masterpieces, *Rothko Chapel* in particular. But even the knotting of oriental rugs gave Feldman musical ideas (*The Turfan Fragments*).

To the question as to why he preferred soft dynamic levels, he replied:

“Because when it’s loud, you can’t hear the sound. You hear its attack. Then you don’t hear the sound, only in its decay. And I think that’s essentially what impressed Boulez. That he heard a sound, not an attack, emerging and disappearing without attack and decay, almost like an electronic medium.

Also, you have to remember that loud and soft is an aspect of differentiation. And my music is more like a kind of monologue that does not need exclamation point, colon, it does not need...”

Feldman also had an intriguing reply up his sleeve when it came to answering the question why he composed in the first place:

“You know that marvelous remark of Disraeli’s? Unfortunately, he was not a good writer, but if he was a great writer, it would have been a wonderful remark. They asked him why did he begin to write novels. He said because there was nothing to read. (laughs). I felt very much like that in terms of contemporary music. I was not really happy with it. It became like a Rorschach test.”

— *biography courtesy of Universal Edition*

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ABOUT THE SOLOIST

Sheila Browne, violist, is an internationally acclaimed soloist, chamber musician, and educator known for her versatile artistry and distinctive viola voice. A native of Philadelphia and Irish citizen, she has performed on six continents at major venues including Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Concertgebouw, Royal Festival Hall, Teatro Colón, and the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing. She has recorded for Sony, Nonesuch, Bridge, Albany, and MSR, premiered concertos written especially for her, and collaborated extensively with leading composers and artists.

A former violist of the internationally prize-winning Arianna String Quartet and a founding member of the Fire Pink Trio, Browne has also performed with numerous distinguished ensembles and artists. She served as principal violist of the New World Symphony and was featured in the PBS documentary *Beethoven Alive!*.

A Primrose Memorial Soloist, Browne was Karen Tuttle's teaching assistant for four years at The Juilliard School as an undergraduate, receiving a Bachelor of Music, then earned an Aufbau degree with famed soloist Kim Kashkashian at the Musik Hochschule in Freiburg on a DAAD scholarship, and earned a Master of Music from Rice University studying with Karen Ritscher in Paul Katz's Quartet Program.

A deeply committed educator, Browne has given masterclasses at major conservatories throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. She has held faculty positions at the Tianjin Juilliard School, University of North Carolina School of the Arts, University of Delaware, University of Tennessee, Duke University, NYU, Lynn Conservatory, and currently serves as viola faculty at CIM. Her students have gone on to leading viola programs and successful professional careers worldwide.

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ABOUT THE ENSEMBLE

The CIM New Music Ensemble was first formed as the CIM Contemporary Music Ensemble in 1973 by composer Donald Erb (a precursor to the ensemble was CIM's "Portfolio" Series in the early 1970s). Its first concert was given on October 10, 1973, and was devoted to the music of Bernard Heiden, with whom Erb had studied at Indiana University. Since then, the ensemble has been led by Larry Baker and Margaret Brouwer; it is currently led by Keith Fitch, head of the CIM Composition Department. Devoted to the music of our time — as well as classics of the 20th century — in recent years the ensemble has hosted many of today's leading composers, including Claude Baker, Chen Yi, Donald Crockett, James Mobberly, Andrew Norman, David Rakowski, Shulamit Ran, Augusta Read Thomas, Steven Stucky, and Joan Tower, among others. Members of the ensemble have gone on to establish such contemporary music ensembles and series as Classical Revolution Cleveland, FiveOne Experimental Orchestra, and Ars Futura, as well as being members of such nationally recognized groups as wild Up and the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble. Notable alumni of the ensemble include the 2014 gold medal laureate of the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, Jinjoo Cho. For several years, the ensemble partnered with the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland as part of their concert series; it now appears regularly at the Cleveland Museum of Art and as part of NEOSonicFest, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony's annual celebration of contemporary music in Northeastern Ohio.

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ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Keith Fitch currently heads the Composition Department and holds the Vincent K. and Edith H. Smith Chair in Composition at the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he also directs the CIM New Music Ensemble. Called “gloriously luminous” by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, his music has been consistently noted for its eloquence, expressivity, dramatic sense of musical narrative, and unique sense of color and sonority. Reviewing a performance of his work *Totem* by Wolfgang Sawallisch and The Philadelphia Orchestra (chosen by Maestro Sawallisch to celebrate the orchestra’s centennial), *The Wall Street Journal* praised “the sheer concentration of his writing, and its power to express a complex, unseen presence shaping the course of musical events.” The American Academy of Arts and Letters has said, “[his] music reveals an individual landscape that concentrates on unusual textures and sounds — all within a strong narrative that drives towards a rich and powerful conclusion.”

His works have been performed throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia by such ensembles and soloists as The Philadelphia Orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, St. Luke’s Chamber Ensemble, Colorado Quartet, Da Capo Chamber Players, harpist Yolanda Kondonassis, guitarist Jason Vieaux, and many others. His music has been heard at the Mostly Modern Festival, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, June in Buffalo, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and New York’s Carnegie and Merkin Halls, among others. Recent works include *Alee* for orchestra, commissioned by the Cleveland Institute of Music for its centennial; *still*, commissioned by the Chicago Center for Contemporary Composition at the University of Chicago; and *Mirrors*, commissioned by the Ellis-Beauregard Foundation for the Bangor Symphony Orchestra.

A native of Indiana, Fitch (b. 1966) began composing at age 7 and began formal musical training on the double bass at age 11. While still in high school (age 16), he received his first professional orchestral performance. He attended the Indiana University School of Music, where he studied composition with Frederick Fox, Eugene O’Brien, and Claude Baker; double bass with Bruce Bransby and Murray Grodner; and chamber music with Rostislav Dubinsky, founder of the Borodin Quartet. He also counts Donald Erb and Joan Tower among his compositional mentors. Among his many awards are a Guggenheim

Foundation Fellowship, the Ellis-Beauregard Foundation Composer Award, the Arts and Letters Award in Music and the Walter Hinrichsen Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Fromm Music Foundation Commission, three Individual Excellence Awards from the Ohio Arts Council, a Copland House Residency Award, and an Individual Artist Grant from the Indiana Arts Commission/National Endowment for the Arts. He has enjoyed multiple residencies at The MacDowell Colony and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, as well as at Yaddo, The Charles Ives Center for American Music, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and twice served as resident composer and faculty at the Chamber Music Conference and Composers' Forum of the East.

Highly regarded as a teacher, chamber music coach, and conductor of new music, he has taught at Indiana University, Bard College, and for 11 years served on the faculty of the Mannes College of Music in New York. From 2015-17, he served as composer-in-residence and director of the Young Artist Seminar in Composition at the Rocky Ridge Music Center. He frequently appears as guest composer at colleges, universities, and summer festivals nationwide, and his students regularly win awards from such prestigious organizations as ASCAP, BMI, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Fulbright Foundation, as well as attending leading summer festivals around the world.

A passionate advocate for new music, for five years, he curated a concert series at Cleveland's Museum of Contemporary Art, and he has mentored such ensembles as Cleveland's FiveOne Experimental Orchestra and Ars Futura ensemble, as well as individual members of leading new music ensembles throughout the country. Not one to avoid controversy, in 2014, he organized and co-authored an open letter that took to task The Cleveland Orchestra for failing to program works by American composers. That letter went viral, gaining national attention and re-igniting a conversation about the place of American music on our nation's orchestral programs. Equally adept at working behind the scenes, he also guided pianist Daniil Trifonov, the 2011 Tchaikovsky Competition gold medalist, in the composition and world premiere of Trifonov's first piano concerto.

His music is published by Non Sequitur Music and Edition Peters and appears on Azica Records and Naxos Digital. He joined the CIM faculty in 2008.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday, October 16

7:30pm | Kulas Hall

CIM Orchestra

Sarah Ioannides, conductor, *Kulas Foundation Visiting Artist*

FARRENC Overture No. 2 in E-flat, Op. 24

ANDRÉE Overture in G minor

ANDRÉE Varför och därför

MENDELSSOHN Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 107,
"Reformation"

Thursday, October 29

7:30pm | Mixon Hall

Fire & Grace

Edwin Huizinga, violin

William Coulter, guitar, *Kulas Foundation Visiting Artist*

Amanda Powell, voice, *Kulas Foundation Visiting Artist*

Experience the exhilarating meeting of classical, folk, and contemporary traditions from around the world in a performance that crosses musical borders with infectious energy. Fire & Grace brings together violin, guitar, and voice in a vibrant celebration of connection, tradition, and improvisation.

Wednesday, November 4

7:30pm | Mixon Hall

The U.S. Army String Quartet, *Kulas Foundation Visiting Artists*

Patrick Lin (MM '18), violin

Allison Smith, violin

Julia Clancy (BM '14), viola

Ben Wensel (BM '99), cello

Experience the precision, artistry, and musical excellence of the U.S. Army String Quartet in a performance that blends timeless masterworks with the unmatched discipline of one of America's premier military ensembles.

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