

Friday Evening, October 26, 2018, at 7:30

The Juilliard School

presents

# AXIOM

Jeffrey Milarsky, *Conductor*

Nadia Sirota, *Viola*

Matthew Pearce, *Tenor*

NICO MUHLY (b. 1981) ***No Uncertain Terms*** (2017)

JOHN CORIGLIANO (b. 1938) ***Chiaroscuro*** (1997)

Light

Shadows

Strobe

YIJIA WANG, *Piano*

SALOME JORDANIA, *Piano (Tuned a Quarter-Tone Lower)*

*Intermission*

MUHLY ***Keep in Touch*** (2005); arranged by Chris Thompson

NADIA SIROTA, *Viola*

CORIGLIANO ***Poem in October*** (1970)

MATTHEW PEARCE, *Tenor*

*Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes, including one intermission*

The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not permitted in this auditorium.

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Alice Tully Hall

*Please make certain that all electronic devices  
are turned off during the performance.*

## Notes on the Program

by Matthew Mendez

### **No Uncertain Terms**

NICO MUHLY

*Born August 26, 1981, in Randolph, Vermont*

Equal parts generous collaborator and tireless operator, Nico Muhly (M.M. '04, *composition*) is probably the most visible representative of a generation of younger American composers whose members first came into public view during the 2000s, united in the conviction that rigid old dichotomies like “popular”/“classical” and “accessible”/“serious” had become not so much blurry or even arbitrary as—finally—meaningless. Informally mentored by Philip Glass (Diploma '60, M.S. 62, *composition*), from whom he learned the virtues of fostering one's own musical micro-community, Muhly began putting this “post-genre” ethos (as some have referred to it) into practice early and often, starting with his time at Juilliard, from which he graduated with a master's degree in 2004. Indeed, the intervening decade and a half have seen him engaged in an almost impossibly multifarious array of musical activity, with few, if any, mediums, forms, or scenes off limits: on any given day, Muhly is just as likely to be found lending his talents to projects spearheaded by the likes of Björk, Usher, and Sufjan Stevens as he is to be focusing his energies on a stage work for the Metropolitan Opera. (*Marnie*, his second Met commission, is currently receiving its premiere run at the house.)

Written under the auspices of Carnegie Hall, for a concert series curated by Steve Reich ('61, *composition*) on the occasion of his 80th birthday year, *No Uncertain Terms* pays direct tribute to the elder composer—an affirmation, offered with all of the rhetorical force indicated in the title, of the

essential role played by the latter's music in Muhly's creative and personal lives. Opening with a near-literal quotation of the first measures of Reich's 1976 magnum opus *Music for 18 Musicians*—a kind of *objet trouvé* that sets the rest of *No Uncertain Terms* in relief, functioning to make its sonic cross-references intelligible—Muhly's homage is built around a sequence of 14 chords that recur repeatedly, in a manner reminiscent of a Baroque chaconne. As has often been the case with chaconnes, Muhly's harmonic cycle remains more or less fixed, even as it remains subject to a process of constant reflection, functioning like a fixed prism through which many luminous variants are diffracted.

This dynamic is tied to Muhly's description of *No Uncertain Terms* as “a sort of archive” documenting some of the ways Reich's output has influenced his own: the “personal archive” is one of Muhly's favorite metaphors, which refers to “all the things, physical and otherwise, that define us.” That is to say that in depicting various facets of his musical relationship with Reich, Muhly also depicts himself (and in this respect, it is no coincidence that a recording of *Music for 18 Musicians* was the first album Muhly ever purchased). As such, characteristic Muhly preoccupations—allusions to the late Renaissance Anglican choral music he grew up singing in Rhode Island; earnest outbursts of “romantic over-expression” for the strings; nods to the mystical practice of glossolalia (speaking in tongues)—become charged with all manner of unexpected, unheard-of resonances once placed in *No Uncertain Terms'* Reichian frame.

### **Chiaroscuro**

JOHN CORIGLIANO

*Born February 16, 1938, in New York, New York*

Among that rare breed of artists who will try anything at least once, John Corigliano,

who marked his 80th birthday earlier this year, is one of the nation's most decorated living composers, being the unprecedented winner of a Pulitzer Prize, Grawemeyer Award, Academy Award, and multiple Grammys. Indeed, the sheer extent of these accolades is direct testament to the wide-ranging trajectory of Corigliano's career: over the course of its six decades, he has consistently made a positive virtue out of his adaptability, whether it was his intensive involvement with incidental music during his 20s, his mid-career work scoring films (notably, he wrote the soundtracks to *Altered States* and *The Red Violin*), or his strongly held belief in the need for new concertos for instruments lacking an extensive repertoire (his catalog features solo vehicles for oboe, clarinet, and flute). That belief stems, in turn, from Corigliano's acute sense of the composer's position in society: as long ago as 1982, he firmly avowed that the composer's "responsibility does not end with the final double bar." By this he was referring literally to all the things composers have recently been obliged to do past the sheer act of writing of music, like self-financing recordings, working to ensure premieres also receive second and third performances, and teaching. He has made a particular specialty of the last of these: a longtime faculty member at both Juilliard and Lehman College (Muhly was among his Juilliard pupils), Corigliano is widely admired as an inspiring, dedicated pedagogue, and in recognition of his reputation as an upstanding artistic citizen, some 15 years ago a scholarship was established in his name at the latter institution, the aim of which is to provide financial aid to students who might otherwise not have the opportunity to study music.

Ever since the 1970s Corigliano has taken a kind of problem-solving approach to new projects, which has meant that in practice, he has often gravitated toward commissions that would oblige him to tackle

unusual or unfamiliar technical and expressive challenges. Written for two pianos, one tuned a quarter-tone lower than is customary, *Chiaroscuro* is among the fruits of this line of thinking. (The quarter-tone is half the size of the usual semitone, the smallest division of the octave traditionally employed in Western music.) Corigliano has related his initial, leery reaction to the proposed commission: "Why should I write a two-piano piece when I could write a one-piano piece that sounds like two pianos? What's the point? Why do I need the second piano?" He hit upon an answer to these questions once he realized the pianos could be employed in such a way that quarter-tones would be generated as a result of the tuning discrepancy between them (Corigliano: "Each piano would sound perfectly tuned by itself but, for example, the note G on one piano would sound at a pitch between G and F sharp on the other piano"). Yet although the use of two keyboards tuned in this manner does have a precedent in works by Charles Ives and the unheralded Russian émigré Ivan Wyschnegradsky, Corigliano's decision was not rooted in a desire to employ micro-intervals to construct alternate tuning systems or scales per se, but instead to exploit the untapped "lyrical possibilities of the quarter tone." He was "looking for the expressive power between two notes," as he later put it—much "like a blues singer does."

As befits its title, *Chiaroscuro* is concerned with exploring the light and shade inherent in those "in-between" intervals, and does so differently in each of its three movements. The curtain-raising *Light* contrasts theatrical broken chords in one piano with quiet, furtive textures in the other, before leading directly into the slow *Shadows*. Here low, somber chords and tentative melodic strands are overlaid with feather-light interplay between the two keyboards' highest registers, after which comes a

central passage in which Corigliano retrofits “the sighing semitones that classical music has always used to express mourning” out of quarter-tones, for an effect he considered “both subtler and more intense.” Last comes *Strobe*, a disturbingly whirligig *perpetuum mobile*, in which the conflicting tunings produce a sonic analog to the flashing and streaking of the titular light source. The disorientation is only compounded with the entry and subsequent elaboration of what Corigliano indicates is a quotation from a Bach chorale—a harmonization of the “Old 100th” hymn tune. Here the second pianist temporarily joins the other player at the normal keyboard, initiating an uneasy, tentative peace. Nevertheless, the accord is fated not to last: before long, the turbulent toccata makes its return, initiating an escalation of hostilities with the chorale tune, before exhausting itself in a spasm of utter brute force.

### **Keep in Touch**

NICO MUHLY

Few of Muhly’s creative partnerships have exerted a more enduring effect on his sense of compositional self as has his longstanding association with his fellow Juilliard alumna, violist, curator, and radio personality Nadia Sirota. Now firmly established as a cornerstone of New York’s post-genre community thanks to her virtuoso instrumental versatility, Sirota was the impetus for a number of Muhly’s most celebrated early achievements, perhaps the most personal of which was *Keep in Touch*. Originally devised for Sirota’s viola and pre-recorded back-track only, in its final form the piece bore the stamp of another key Muhly collaborator, the Icelandic producer Valgeir Sigurðsson, with whom he established a working relationship during the period of *Keep in Touch*’s composition. It was from Sigurðsson, who made his name helping fashion beatscapes for Björk, that Muhly began to appreciate the creative

possibilities afforded by a non-“classical” approach to the recording studio—one where the end result would not be an “objective,” documentary rendering of a score as heard in performance, but instead, one in which various recording techniques, in and of themselves, became integral to the effect of the composition on its album format.

This thinking proved paramount for *Keep in Touch*, and as Sirota recalls, the way she was mic’d for the recording even had a lasting impact on her playing style, which became more direct and vulnerable as a result:

It was so close you could hear every single scrape of the string and all of these little sounds that I always heard were “bad sounds” that people didn’t want to hear—the stuff you try to erase when you’re playing professionally, we amplified by this recording. So at first I was really horrified by it and then the more I listened to that recording, the more I started to love it. There was so much beauty in those inaudible sounds and things that were very close to silence were very stunning.

A similar mentality informed the composition of the back-track, which was partly constructed out of various kinds of “micro-sounds”—among them, a miscellany of unidentifiable crackles and crinkles, especially the small, inimitable wobbles and warbles of Muhly’s friend, the singer Anohni (originally of Antony and the Johnsons).

About a decade after Muhly wrote *Keep in Touch*, another colleague, Chris Thompson (M.M. ’03, *percussion*) of the new music ensemble Alarm Will Sound, took up the challenge of transcribing the prerecorded component for small orchestra, in the process creating a kind of pocket concerto for Sirota. (Alarm Will Sound had

previously toured instrumental arrangements of album tracks by the Beatles and Aphex Twin, so the idea of translating sounds that had only existed as “fictions” of the recording studio was not foreign to Thompson.) For those familiar with the original score, one of the sources of fascination provoked by the reimagined version is therefore Thompson’s orchestral resourcefulness: he has found purely acoustic solutions for rendering even Muhly’s most distinctive, individualistic sonorities. Thus if certain elements readily lent themselves to transcription—for example, the piece’s repeating organ descent, taken up here by woodwinds and brass—others required outside-the-box thinking, as was true of an eerie synthesized texture that makes its entry near the climax, but which is simulated here with whirly tubes (plastic hose-like toys). Yet even in *Keep in Touch*’s orchestral garb, what stays constant is the viola protagonist’s expression of the intense human need to “remain in connection,” which was, in a way, precisely what Muhly and Sigurðsson’s approach to recording Sirota’s sound had been designed to elicit in the first place.

### ***Poem in October***

JOHN CORIGLIANO

While it is true that during the 1970s Corigliano made concerted efforts to broaden his musical vocabulary via the careful assimilation of selected avant-garde style traits, at root, he has always remained true to the direct, no-nonsense communicative ethos shared by the American composers who were his guides in the initial stages of his career—figures like Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, and Samuel Barber. If much of Corigliano’s early work partook directly of the homegrown, distinctively Americanist lingua franca cultivated by those men, then his *Poem in October*, commissioned by the Chamber Music

Society of Lincoln Center for its very first season, in 1970, is perfectly representative of this phase of his development just as it was nearing its close. To be sure, compared to the music he composed in his 20s, he now “was using more irregular rhythms,” as he later noted, not to mention “a harmonic language that had stretched a bit.” But even the score’s spikiest textures (abetted by the resourceful use of a harpsichord) would have done Copland proud, and whatever its expressive shadows, *Poem in October*’s dominant effect remains one of penetrating, rapt vocal lyricism—the gift which has never left Corigliano, whatever the other changes in his music.

Yet that lyricism is also shot through with a kind of uncertainty, which is thematized writ small in the score’s opening bars, where a succession of distinct, sharply etched musical ideas pass by in collage-like manner: a fanfare-like figure for oboe and clarinet; a bright little flute ditty; slashing figures in the strings, followed by a dancing, propulsive, rhythmically asymmetrical theme; and once the tenor enters, unsettled harpsichord figuration. There was a clear expressive rationale for this “patchwork” strategy. *Poem in October* was Corigliano’s second large-scale setting of words by Dylan Thomas, the Welsh poet best known for “Do not go gentle into that good night,” and whose work has been a longstanding source of inspiration for the composer. (Corigliano subsequently incorporated *Poem in October* into his hour long *A Dylan Thomas Trilogy*, a “memory play” whose component parts were written and revised over the course of 40 years.) About Thomas’ poems, Corigliano has observed that they “have reappeared in my life precisely when they have felt most autobiographical, and just when I needed to write exactly the music they have evoked.” This was particularly true of *Poem in October*, since the eponymous text, which documents its narrator’s emotional responses

to turning 30, was written as Thomas himself reached that age; in like fashion, Corigliano set the text in the aftermath of his own 30th birthday. But the poem is scarcely celebratory but rather reflective and irresolute, and so the “patchwork” strategy sensitively captures the narrator’s quicksilver shifts of affect. In the process such an abundance of expressive terrain is traversed that by the closing pages, the narrator’s hard-won declaration of hope

regarding the future of his “heart’s truth” rings entirely true, too.

*Matthew Mendez is a New Haven-based critic and musicologist with a focus on 20th- and 21st-century repertoire. He is a graduate of Harvard University and is currently a Ph.D. student at Yale. Mendez was the recipient of a 2016 ASCAP Foundation Deems Taylor/Virgil Thomson Award for outstanding music journalism.*

## Text

### **Poem in October**

DYLAN THOMAS

It was my thirtieth year to heaven  
Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood  
And the mussel pooled and the heron  
Priested shore  
The morning beckon  
With water praying and call of seagull and rook  
And the knock of sailing boats on the webbed wall  
Myself to set foot  
That second  
In the still sleeping town and set forth.

My birthday began with the water-  
Birds and the birds of the winged trees flying my name  
Above the farms and the white horses  
And I rose  
In a rainy autumn  
And walked abroad in shower of all my days  
High tide and the heron dived when I took the road  
Over the border  
And the gates  
Of the town closed as the town awoke.

A springful of larks in a rolling  
Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling  
Blackbirds and the sun of October  
Summery  
On the hill’s shoulder,  
Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly

Come in the morning where I wandered and listened  
To the rain wringing  
Wind blow cold  
In the wood faraway under me.

Pale rain over the dwindling harbour  
And over the sea wet church the size of a snail  
With its horns through mist and the castle  
Brown as owls  
But all the gardens  
Of spring and summer were blooming in the tall tales  
Beyond the border and under the lark full cloud.  
There could I marvel  
My birthday  
Away but the weather turned around.

It turned away from the blithe country  
And down the other air and the blue altered sky  
Streamed again a wonder of summer  
With apples  
Pears and red currants  
And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's  
Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother  
Through the parables  
Of sunlight  
And the legends of the green chapels

And the twice told fields of infancy  
That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in mine.  
These were the woods the river and the sea  
Where a boy  
In the listening  
Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy  
To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide.  
And the mystery  
Sang alive  
Still in the water and singing birds.

And there could I marvel my birthday  
Away but the weather turned around. And the true  
Joy of the long dead child sang burning  
In the sun.  
It was my thirtieth  
Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon  
Though the town below lay leaved with October blood.  
O may my heart's truth  
Still be sung  
On this high hill in a year's turning.

## Meet the Artists

PETER KONERKO

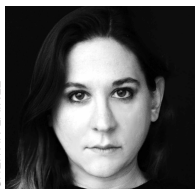


**Jeffrey Milarsky**

American conductor Jeffrey Milarsky is music director of AXIOM and senior lecturer in music at Columbia University where he is music director and conductor of the Columbia University Orchestra. He received his bachelor and master of music degrees from Juilliard where he was awarded the Peter Mennin Prize for outstanding leadership and achievement in the arts. In recent seasons he has worked with ensembles including the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Milwaukee Symphony, American Composers Orchestra, MET Chamber Ensemble, Bergen Philharmonic, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, New World Symphony, and Tanglewood Festival Orchestra. In the U.S. and abroad he has premiered and recorded works by many groundbreaking contemporary composers in Carnegie Hall, Zankel Hall, Davies Symphony Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Boston's Symphony Hall, and at IRCAM in Paris, among others. Milarsky has a long history of premiering, recording, and performing American composers and throughout his career has collaborated with John Adams, Milton Babbitt, John Cage, Elliott Carter, John Corigliano, George Crumb, Mario Davidovsky, Jacob Druckman, Michael Gordon, David Lang, Steven Mackey, Christopher Rouse, Ralph Shapey, Morton Subotnick, Charles Wuorinen, and an entire generation of young and developing composers. In 2013 he was awarded the Ditson Conductor's Award for his commitment to the performance of American music. A much-in-demand timpanist and

percussionist, Milarsky has been the principal timpanist for the Santa Fe Opera since 2005. In addition he has performed and recorded with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Pittsburgh Symphony. He has recorded extensively for Angel, Bridge, Teldec, Telarc, New World, CRI, MusicMasters, EMI, Koch, and London records.

SHERVIN LAINEZ



**Nadia Sirota**

Violist Nadia Sirota's singular sound and expressive execution have served as muses to dozens of composers, including Nico Muhly, Bryce Dessner, Missy Mazzoli, Daniel Bjarnason, Judd Greenstein, Marcos Balter, and David Lang. She won a 2015 Peabody Award for her podcast *Meet the Composer*, which profiled today's most interesting musical thinkers. This season she is the New York Philharmonic's first-ever creative partner, a position created for her in which she will host nine contemporary music concerts over two new series, Nightcap and Sound ON, the latter of which she will also curate. As a soloist she has appeared with the Detroit Symphony, Colorado Symphony, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Spanish National Orchestra, and Orchestre National d'Île-de-France. She has released four albums of commissioned music, most recently *Tessellatum*, Donnacha Dennehy's groundbreaking work for viola and microtonal viola da gamba consort, featuring Liam Byrne. Sirota has lent her sound to recording and concert projects by The National, David Bowie, and Björk, and is a member of chamber sextet yMusic, whose virtuosic execution and unique configuration have attracted high-profile collaborators Paul Simon, Ben Folds, Anohni, and the Staves, and inspired an expanding repertoire of



original works by composers Andrew Norman, Caroline Shaw, and Chris Thile. She has received the ASCAP Deems Taylor Award for her work in radio and Southern Methodist University's Meadows Prize, awarded to pioneering artists and scholars with an emerging international profile. She sits on the board of directors of Chamber Music America, the national service organization for ensemble music professionals. She received her undergraduate and master's degrees from Juilliard, where she studied with Heidi Castleman, Misha Amory, and Hsin-Yun Huang.



HENRY HUHTULAG

**Matthew Pearce**

Tenor Matthew Pearce is a second year master's candidate from Union, Kentucky, studying under Marlena Malas at Juilliard, where he sang in *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (La théière) and *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (Spärlich). He also appeared in the Juilliard Vocal Arts Cabaret and premiered *Toys in a Field: Songs From Dien Cai Dau* with the Juilliard Orchestra. Pearce has performed with the New York Festival of Song and made his David Geffen Hall debut in the New York premiere of *Thy Will Be Done* with the National Chorale. This past summer he appeared as Don José in *Carmen* at the Chautauqua Institution. He received his bachelor's in vocal performance from the University of Kentucky, studying under Everett McCorvey.

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## AXIOM

AXIOM is dedicated to performing the masterworks of the 20th- and 21st-century repertoire. Since its debut in 2006 (Nadia Sirota was a founder), the group has established itself as a leading ensemble in New York City's contemporary music scene with performances throughout Lincoln Center, in addition to frequent appearances at Columbia University's Miller Theatre and (Le) Poisson Rouge in Greenwich Village. AXIOM is led by music director Jeffrey Milarsky and is grounded in Juilliard's curriculum. Students receive a credit in chamber music for performing in the ensemble, and during any four-year period, AXIOM members will have the opportunity to perform works by John Adams, Harrison Birtwistle, Magnus Lindberg, and Arnold Schoenberg, among other composers. Guest conductors of AXIOM have included Alan Gilbert, Susanna Mälkki, and David Robertson. AXIOM's current season opened with a concert that was part of the New York Philharmonic's The Art of Andriessen festival, followed by today's performance celebrating both John Corigliano's 80th birthday and Nico Muhly on the occasion of the Met Opera's production of his opera *Marnie*, and concluding in April with a program of music by Iannis Xenakis, Caroline Shaw, and Steve Reich. The 2017–18 season comprised programs featuring the music of composer and former Juilliard faculty members Jacob Druckman and Luciano Berio, and Hans Abrahamsen's complete *Schnee*. In 2016–17 AXIOM programs honored John Adams on his 70th birthday, Steve Reich on his 80th birthday, and the music of Kaija Saariaho.

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