

Friday Evening, April 25, 2025, at 7:30

The Juilliard School

presents

AXIOM

JEFFREY MILARSKY, *Conductor*

SOPHIA WERNER, *Violin*

PENGXI ZHU, *Viola*

LIAM CUMMINS (b. 2004) ***Plea*** (2025; World premiere, commissioned by Juilliard)

SOPHIA WERNER, *Violin*

PAUL HINDEMITH (1895–1963) ***Kammermusik No. 5, Op. 36, No. 4*** (1927)

Schnelle Halbe

Langsam

Mäßig schnell

Variante eines Militärmarsches

PENGXI ZHU, *Viola*

Intermission

PIERRE BOULEZ (1925–2016) ***Dérive 2*** (2006)

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes, including an intermission

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Alice Tully Hall

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are turned off during the performance.*

About the Program

By Matthew Mendez

Plea

LIAM CUMMINS

Born: March 20, 2004, in Mansfield, Ohio

Winner of the 2024 AXIOM Composers Competition, Liam Cummins is working towards his bachelor's at Juilliard as a student of John Corigliano. Cummins has already been the recipient of several awards and distinctions, including a Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Although he is also a trained pianist and cellist, his enthusiasms are not limited to music—he is an avid back-packer, photographer, and amateur astronomer. Cummins says that this broad array of interests has parallels in his approach to composition: “My music embraces the fusion of diverse, sometimes seemingly disparate ideas. I want my art and my artistry to connect contrasts and divides—some sonic, some societal—with clarity and nuance.”

A Juilliard commission, Cummins' *Plea* receives its first performance as part of this evening's program. About this quasi-concerto for violin and 15-member chamber ensemble, Cummins provides the following note:

Plea's original title was *A Gentle Plea for Chaos*. This title came from, of all places, a book about English gardening. I loved its mysteriousness and intrigue. As I wrote, I realized that this piece wasn't exactly a plea for chaos, in any obvious sense. Thus, the title became *A Gentle Plea*. Then I realized (after writing one particularly bombastic section) that the piece was in no way gentle. The title became simply *Plea*.

We all have our pleas—personal and universal, reasonable and impossible, large and small. Maybe they are pleas

to our friends, families, lovers, maybe to a god or to ourselves, maybe whispered into the world for anyone (or no one) to hear. In this piece, the violin is constantly pleading: with the orchestra and itself. No matter how desperate or heartfelt, its pleas are never answered, so it laments time and again with a mournful melody.

A kind of instrumental drama that traverses a wide range of textures, moods, and incidents, *Plea* is knitted together by the recurrence and transformation of its very first gesture—the peal of a crotale, which Cummins instructs the percussionist to dip in a tub of water. This causes the crotale's pitch to bend down by a half step, producing a kind of haunting and, indeed, pleading effect. Of the relationship between the crotale effect and the rest of *Plea*, Cummins remarks that “the entire piece is essentially built around the [water crotale's] half-step motive (in that every melody, theme, and motive can be traced back to the descending half-step at some level).”

In Cummins' score, the violin soloist is the principal “pleader,” with the instrumental ensemble serving as a kind of congregation, variously commenting on, joining with, or amplifying the soloist's entreaties. Following the initial crotale stroke, *Plea* begins with a violin cadenza that the score describes as both “mumbling” and “maniacal.” After this, the violin soloist takes on a variety of roles, from imitating the water crotale and participating in games of call-and-response with members of the ensemble to provoking a kind of stark, severe danse macabre. The more frantic, chaotic episodes repeatedly culminate in a stepwise theme that is marked “hushed, chant-like,” and which is first heard in unison clarinet and strings. Its recurrences over the course of *Plea's* roughly 17-minute span are the responses to previous “unanswered pleas,” in Cummins' description—the “lamenting time and again with a mournful melody” described in

his note. Fittingly, *Plea* concludes with one last lament refrain, now sounded in the solo violin's ethereal upper register and accompanied by strings and a parting sequence of crotale peals.

Kammermusik No. 5, Op. 36, No. 4

PAUL HINDEMITH

Born: November 16, 1895, in Hanau, Germany

Died: December 28, 1963, in Frankfurt am Main, Germany

In the early and mid-1920s, Paul Hindemith composed a series of pieces with the aggressively no-frills title *Kammermusik* ("Chamber Music"). Ironically, most of these pieces had little if anything to do with chamber music in any of the 19th-century senses of the term. Though counterintuitive, Hindemith's titles were very much in keeping with the spirit of the times. He was probably the most talented German composer of the generation that came to maturity during the era of the Weimar Republic (1918-33). Coming after Germany's defeat in the First World War, this was a period of deep social and economic instability but, also, considerable creative experimentation and the overturning of old value systems, particularly the ideals associated with art for art's sake. The music historian Richard Taruskin describes the situation this way: "Having experienced ruin, German artists... were more suspicious than anyone else of the lie of transcendence, any promise of immortality, permanence, lasting value. Hence the cult of the perishable, the ephemeral, the transient. Hence, too, the notion of an art that was not only to be used but to be used up."

The loss of faith in art's redemptive or spiritual character helped give rise to the aesthetic current that was soon dubbed the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Usually translated as "new objectivity," this stylistic label is probably better rendered as "new actuality," in the sense of the actual realities of

everyday, worldly experience. In the hands of the young Hindemith and other like-minded German-speaking composers, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* turned its back on the inward-looking, spiritual designs of late romanticism and expressionism, which had reached their apex in the prewar years. Instead, Hindemith and his colleagues had a strong predilection for "machinic" sounds and, especially, musical styles that were perceived as being non- or even anti-expressive—most notably, the baroque. Likewise, as Taruskin's description suggests, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* had little patience for the concept of the enduring, autonomous masterpiece, preferring music with direct practical utility: what he refers to as art "to be used up" (in German, *Gebrauchsmusik*, or "music for use").

Hindemith's *Kammermusik* scores reflected these tendencies in several ways. Most of the *Kammermusik* pieces were written for a then-novel setting—festivals of new and avant-garde music, the first of which came into being in the German-speaking territories in the 1920s. These festivals very much prioritized music for immediate consumption, in the sense that they were concerned above all with the latest stylistic innovations and all things up to the minute. In a way, this represented a kind of revival of the values associated with the aristocratic patronage system that had once supported Europe's baroque composers, who wrote on demand for occasions like courtly dances and weddings and who, for that reason, also had few designs on producing timeless masterpieces.

As for the term *Kammermusik*, it registers Hindemith's rejection of the gargantuan orchestral forces most strongly associated with expressionism and Austro-German early modernism as well as the *Neue Sachlichkeit's* equal and opposite embrace of the sharp edges and clean lines of small ensembles. Most of the entries in the *Kammermusik* series feature a soloist accompanied by

chamber-scale forces, and for this reason—but also, its neo-baroque bias for propulsive motor rhythms and learned counterpoint—it has sometimes been described as a Jazz Age take on Bach's *Brandenburg* Concertos. Unlike the *Brandenburgs*, however, most of the *Kammermusik* works spotlight individual instrumental soloists—in the case of *Kammermusik* No. 5, Hindemith's own instrument, the viola. Hindemith matches its dark, burnished sonority with a chamber orchestra complement that skews toward the lower register: no upper strings, with an emphasis on sardonic bassoons and trombones.

Kammermusik No. 5's unrelenting opening movement is a study in perpetual motion for the viola soloist. So vehemently propulsive is it that, as was often the case with the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the line separating neo-baroque motor rhythms and machine age music becomes hard to discern. It is followed by an extended slow movement. It begins by emphasizing the ensemble's dusky timbres, with a kind of passacaglia theme for low instruments over which the violist spins a more intricate melodic thread. A questioning, contrasting middle section favors more delicate, flute-led textures. After a tart scherzo that features much imitative interplay between soloist and ensemble comes the finale, a nose-thumbing spin on a Bavarian military march that the *Kammermusik* No. 5's first audiences would have known well.

Dérive 2

PIERRE BOULEZ

*Born: March 26, 1925, in Montbrison,
France*

*Died: January 5, 2016, in Baden-Baden,
Germany*

An inspirational trailblazer to some, an overbearing, authoritarian figure in the eyes of others—either way, Pierre Boulez long cast an inescapable shadow over the international avant-garde, as what one prominent critic described as “the omnipresent con-

science of postwar music.” Boulez first came to attention in 1940s Paris, as a 20-something firebrand convinced that the horrors of Europe's recent political past meant that artists would have to start from scratch, stripping the rubble of the inherited musical tradition down to “degree zero.” It was this impulse that drove the young Boulez's search for a compositional language that was so rigorously self-controlled that the results would sound as if they had been written “automatically,” without the slightest trace of expressive intervention. The irony was that no sooner did Boulez achieve this ideal of automatism than he began to experience it as limiting. As the years went on, he distanced himself from the militant extremes of his earlier style, and in his mature works, Boulez's goal became what he called “organized delirium,” precedents for which he found in the meticulous sensuousness of composers like Claude Debussy and Alban Berg. Boulez's formidable intellect and charismatic leadership later served him well in his second career as one of the world's foremost conductors as well as in the running of IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique), the interdisciplinary electroacoustic music atelier he founded at the French government's behest. 2025 marks what would have been his centenary.

Boulez was well known for revisiting and revising his scores, and for announcing “works in progress” whose development went on to span decades. As he once explained, these habits were tied to the difficulty he experienced in “letting go of compositional material that is still alive for me.” *Dérive 2* was no exception to this rule. Initially conceived to celebrate the 80th birthday of Elliott Carter (1908-2012), a composer whose music Boulez admired deeply, the earliest incarnation of *Dérive 2* arrived in 1990, when it was first performed as a miniature of about four or five minutes' duration. Unlike its companion piece,

Dérive 1 (1984), it did not stay that way for long. Over the intervening two decades, Boulez produced a series of ever-expanding versions of *Dérive 2*, until it had mutated into what became his most extended work for purely instrumental forces—an almost 50-minute-long musical labyrinth for four winds, three strings, and a quartet of mallet percussion, harp, and piano.

Boulez's title encapsulates this creative history. The French *dérive* has a double meaning—both “derivative,” in the sense of deriving or arising from a preexisting source, but also “drifting,” with that verb's connotations of unpredictable, even involuntary movement. The first sense of the term is reflected in the fact that *Dérive 2*'s musical germ cell was pitch material borrowed from preliminary studies for Boulez's electroacoustic piece *Répons*. As for the second sense of *dérive*, it captures something of the compositional fate of that cell and, in turn, the many meanderings [*Dérive 2*] took throughout the course of work on it. The piece therefore became a kind of diary reflecting the evolution of the musical ideas themselves, but also the means for organizing them into a sort of narrative mosaic.

Boulez's reference to “narrative mosaic” may seem paradoxical. After all, a narrative consists of a continuously unfolding story and series of events, while a mosaic is constructed via the juxtaposition of contrasting elements (stones or tiles), even if it is also true that the individual elements in a mosaic are typically used to build larger shapes and forms. But Boulez was long drawn to double-edged formulations like this one. For one thing, “narrative mosaic” seems to point to the circumstances in which Boulez composed in the 1980s and beyond, when his work was constantly interrupted by his extensive conducting schedule, meaning that any narrative he may have wished to compose necessarily had a kind of piece-meal, mosaic quality.

On the other hand, the narrative mosaic formulation offers evidence of Boulez's aesthetic interests during his final decades—particularly, his activity conducting the large-scale works of Wagner and Mahler. While he always valued what he referred to as the “kaleidoscopic form” he associated with Stravinsky's most uncompromisingly fragmentary scores, in his last years Boulez spoke increasingly of musical “vistas” and “panoramas,” professing a desire to “get rid of the idea of compartments in a work.” He likened his goal to the effects produced by modernist novelists like Proust: “I don't want any breaks in the music, but you can introduce new ideas and abandon some other ideas, like the characters in a novel.” The concept of “narrative mosaic” connotes this balance of flux, novelty, and continuity.

Dérive 2's mazelike character is the product of a series of superimposed, often competing structuring devices. Among these devices is a set of deep-structural polyrhythms: Not directly perceptible, they nevertheless help govern the music's course, like very slow-moving tectonic plates. Another of key structural concern is the interaction between primary musical text and secondary interruptions. Following an initial horn signal, *Dérive 2* begins kinetically, with harmonically rapid-fire fragments being tossed between the ensemble's instrumental families. As the music progresses, Boulez starts to interject a series of contrasting asides. Harmonically static, they feature sustained and repeated-note textures. As composer Wei-Chieh Lin has argued in an analysis of *Dérive 2*, the text sections feature what Boulez liked to refer to as striated, or pulsed clock time, while the asides favor suspended, frozen smooth time. Although the first interruption is exceedingly short-lived, each interruption proves longer than the previous one. By *Dérive 2*'s midpoint, the asides have proliferated to such an extent that they have overtaken what began as the primary text, so that it is no longer pos-

sible to say which is text and which is the interruption.

The interruptions reach their fullest extension in a central episode first initiated by *legatissimo* clarinet. This episode is far more linear and soloistic than what has come before, and it has some of the qualities of a slow movement. Eventually, a *tutti* C announces the end of the central episode and the start of *Dérive 2*'s second half, which again interleaves smooth and striated textures in the manner of a kaleidoscope. At the end of this section, Boulez offers a relatively literal recapitulation of *Dérive 2*'s opening bars—an oddly traditional maneuver that is nevertheless in keeping with his later interest in “narrative” musical struc-

tures. *Dérive 2* ends with a coda in which the kinetic energy accumulated over the previous 40 minutes is released in a series of violent ensemble stabs. They are punctuated by a final horn cry—a distorting-mirror reflection of the very gesture with which the ensemble first entered *Dérive 2*'s musical labyrinth.

Matthew Mendez, a Palo Alto, California-based musicologist and critic who specializes in 20th- and 21st-century repertoire, received a PhD in music history from Yale University and is a postdoctoral fellow at Stanford University. Mendez was the recipient of a 2016 ASCAP Foundation Deems Taylor/Virgil Thomson Award for outstanding music journalism.

Meet the Artists



Jeffrey Milarsky

American conductor Jeffrey Milarsky (BM '88, MM '90, percussion; faculty 1991-present) is the music director of AXIOM. Known for his innovative programming, he has been hailed for his interpretation of a wide range of repertoire, which spans from Bach to Xenakis. In recent seasons, he has worked with orchestras 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 venues including Carnegie Hall, Zankel Hall, Davies Symphony Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Boston's Symphony Hall, and IRCAM in Paris. Milarsky has a long history of premiering, recording, and performing American composers and, in keeping with that, in 2013 he was presented with the Ditson Conductor's Award. His interest and dedication have brought forth collaborations with Adams, Babbitt, Cage, Carter, Corigliano, Crumb, Davidovsky, Druckman, Gordon, Lang, Mackey, Rouse, Shapey, Subotnick, Wuorinen, and an entire generation of emerging composers. A dedicated teacher, Milarsky serves on the conducting faculty at Juilliard and is a senior lecturer in music at Columbia University, where he is the music director and conductor of the Columbia University Orchestra.

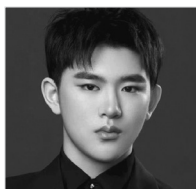
An in-demand timpanist and percussionist, Milarsky has been the principal timpanist for the Santa Fe Opera since 2005. He has also performed and recorded with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Pittsburgh Symphony. He has recorded extensively for Angel, Bridge, Teldec, Telarc, New World, CRI, MusicMasters, EMI, Koch, and London records. As a Juilliard student, Milarsky was awarded the Peter Mennin Prize for outstanding leadership and achievement in the arts.



Sophia Werner

Sophia Werner, who studies at Juilliard with Laurie Smukler, won the 2024 Juilliard Concerto Competition, appearing as a soloist with the Juilliard Orchestra. She has also soloed with AXIOM, Adelphi Orchestra, Cayuga Chamber Orchestra, and the Orchestra of the Southern Finger Lakes. She was awarded the Bach Prize at the 2023 Stulberg International String Competition and won the 2022 Adelphi Young Artist Competition. A passionate chamber musician, Werner has attended the Perlman Music Program and Kneisel Hall. Her piano trio made its Lincoln Center debut last year. She has participated in master classes with members of the Juilliard, Shanghai and Brentano quartets; Hilary Hahn; and Donald Weilerstein. This summer, Werner will attend Verbier Academy as a soloist and return to Perlman. Werner performs on an 1864 J.B. Vuillaume violin and James Tubbs bow, both on loan from Juilliard.

Kovner Fellowship



Pengxi Zhu

Violist Pengxi Zhu, graduate of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, studies at Juilliard with Carol Rodland. Zhu was awarded several competition first prizes, including the Viola Solo and Ensemble Competition of the fourth Singapore Raffles International Music Festival (2017), 29th Young Musician International Competition “Citta di Barletta” (2019), Prokofiev International Music Competition (2021), and Max Bruch

International Music Competition (2024). With abundant experience playing in orchestras and chamber groups, Zhu has played in the National Youth Orchestra of China and Macao Youth Orchestra (principal viola) as well as performing as a soloist with Chongqing Philharmonic Orchestra, Shanxi Symphony Orchestra (with conductor Jinyi Jiang), and Central Conservatory of Music Symphony Orchestra (with conductor Lin Chen). Zhu has also played many solo recitals, performing in venues including the International Center of Music and Arts in Beijing, Chongqing Philharmonic Factory Art Space, and Cavendo Tutus Concert Hall in Beijing.

Kovner Fellowship

AXIOM

AXIOM, led by music director Jeffrey Milarsky, is dedicated to performing the masterworks of the 20th- and 21st-century repertoire. Since its debut in Avery Fisher Hall (now David Geffen Hall) in 2006, the student-created group has established itself as a leading ensemble in New York City's contemporary music scene with performances throughout Lincoln Center, in addition to appearances at Columbia University's Miller Theatre and (Le) Poisson Rouge in Greenwich Village. AXIOM is grounded in Juilliard's curriculum. Students receive a credit for performing in the ensemble and, during any four-year period, AXIOM members will have the opportunity to perform works by John Adams, Jacob Druckman (BS '54, MS '56, composition; faculty 1956-72), and Marcus Lindberg, among others. Guest conductors have included Alan Gilbert (Pre-College '85; MM '94, orchestral conducting; faculty 2009-18), Susanna Mälkki, and David Robertson (faculty 2018-present). Last season, AXIOM performed works by Hans Abrahamsen, Harrison Birtwistle, Alexandros Darna, Amy Beth Kirsten (faculty 2022-present), Oliver Knussen, György Ligeti, Olivier Messiaen, Arvo Pärt, Louise Talma, and Anna Thorvaldsdottir. In the 2022-23 season, the ensemble played music by Elliott Carter (faculty 1966-84), Unsuk Chin, George Crumb, Jordyn Carmen (MM '20, composition), Paul Hindemith, Charles Ives, Arnold Schoenberg, Toru Takemitsu, Joan Tower, and Charles Wuorinen. And in the 2021-22 season, AXIOM performed works by Thomas Adès, Marcos Balter, Pierre Boulez (faculty 1972-75), Anthony Braxton, Carter, Tania León, George Lewis, Messiaen, Jeffrey Mumford, and Alvin Singleton.

AXIOM

Jeffrey Milarsky, *Conductor*

CUMMINS <i>Plea</i>	Trombone Austin Murray	E-flat Clarinet Anoush Pogossian	Cello Ben Deighton
First Violin Joshua Kim	Percussion Ning Tie, <i>Principal</i> Minwoo Jeong	Bass Clarinet Alice McDonald	English Horn Evan Yonce
Second Violin Juyeon Diana Lee	Piano Heting Xia	Bassoon Vinay Sundar, <i>Principal</i> Bobby Thompson	Clarinet Anoush Pogossian
Viola Laura Liu	Harp Raquel Nisi	Contrabassoon Lucca Caise	Bassoon Bobby Thompson
Cello Emil Olejnik	HINDEMITH <i>Kammermusik No. 5,</i> <i>Op. 36, No. 4</i>	Horn Austin Adaranijo	Horn Nathan Spergel, <i>Principal</i> Austin Adaranijo
Double Bass Andrew Vinther	Cello Ben Deighton, <i>Principal</i> Sally Yiran Deng Wujin Kim Namisa Sun	Trumpet Jade Park, <i>Principal</i> Jack Ramu	Percussion Ning Tie, <i>Principal</i> Will Hopkins*
Flute/Piccolo Phoebe Rawn	Bass Andrew Vinther, <i>Principal</i> Maxine Gimbel Ella Marchetti Nicholas Payne	Trombone Austin Murray	Piano Heting Xia
Oboe Jiayun Li	Flute/Piccolo Phoebe Rawn	Bass Trombone Mirza Alkhairid	Harp Raquel Nisi
Clarinet/E-flat Clarinet/ Bass Clarinet Alice McDonald	Oboe Jiayun Li	Tuba David Sparks	
Bassoon Lucca Caise	Clarinet Chris Dechant	BOULEZ <i>Dérive 2</i>	
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Trumpet Jade Park		Viola Jinglin Zhou	

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