

# A Far Cry

Tuesday, July 11  
7:30pm



In celebration of 118 years of Free Concerts for the people of New York City  
The oldest continuous free outdoor concert series in the world.  
Tonight's concert is being broadcast live on classical WQXR 105.9 FM  
and via live stream at [www.wqxr.org](http://www.wqxr.org). WQXR

**Oswaldo Golijov**, (b. 1960), *Un día Bom*, (2021)

III. *Arum dem Fayer*, arr. Alex Fortes (2023)

**Jessie Montgomery**, (b. 1981), *Banner*, (2014)

**Juantio Becenti**, (b. 1983), *The Glittering World*, (2023)

#### INTERMISSION

**Antonín Dvořák**, (1841-1904), *String Quartet no.12, Op.96, "American"*, (1893),  
arr. by Sarah Darling (2017)

I. Allegro ma non troppo, II. Lento, III. Molto vivace, IV. Finale: Vivace ma non troppo

Opening Fanfare: **eGALitarian Brass**, *World Premiere Work*, (2023),  
Composer, Anthony Davis

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Becenti Solo Violin  
Miki Cloud

#### **Violin**

Alex Fortes  
Annie Rabbat  
Gabriela Díaz  
Jae Cosmos Lee  
Jesse Irons  
Megumi Stohs Lewis  
Miki Cloud  
Zenas Hsu

#### **Viola**

Caitlin Lynch  
Celia Hatton  
Jason Fisher  
Sarah Darling

#### **Cello**

Michael Unterman  
Rafael Popper-Keizer  
Francesca McNeeley

#### **Bass**

Lizzie Burns  
Karl Doty

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The Hess and Helyn Kline Foundation

# A Far Cry Program Notes

## **Oswaldo Golijov (b. 1960) :: *Um Día Bom, III. Arum dem Fayer (Around the Fire)*, transc. Alex Fortes**

Arum dem Fayer or “Around the Fire” is a traditional Yiddish song that also talks about the bliss of being together around a small fire. In my version, the song appears and disappears, as a ghost, in the midst of a slow processional and restrained tears. Schubert’s motif of the slow movement of *Death and the Maiden* is in the background throughout that first section. A different manifestation of *Death* interrupts the processional in a short and furiously baroque appearance that opens the door to three funny and mischievous dance variations on the B section of the Yiddish song. The movement closes with the reemergence of the opening processional. I wrote this movement in memory of Guillermo Limonic, who loved singing in Yiddish, and died of Covid in the early days of the pandemic.

–Oswaldo Golijov

## **Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981) :: *Banner***

*Banner* is a tribute to the 200th anniversary of “The Star Spangled Banner,” [the lyrics of which were written by Francis Scott Key in 1814]. *Banner* is a rhapsody on the theme of “The Star Spangled Banner.” Drawing on musical and historical sources from various world anthems and patriotic songs, I’ve made an attempt to answer the question: “What does an anthem for the 21st century sound like in today’s multicultural environment?”

In 2009, I was commissioned by the Providence String Quartet and Community MusicWorks to write *Anthem*, a tribute to the historical election of Barack Obama. In that piece, I wove together the theme from “The Star Spangled Banner” with the commonly named Black National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by James Weldon Johnson (which coincidentally share the exact same phrase structure). *Banner* picks up where *Anthem* left off by using a similar backbone source in

its middle section, but expands further both in the amount of references and also in the role played by the string quartet as the individual voice working both with and against the larger community of the orchestra behind them. The structure is loosely based on traditional marching band form, where there are several strains or contrasting sections, preceded by an introduction, and I have drawn on the drum line chorus as a source for the rhythmic underpinning in the finale. Within the same tradition, I have attempted to evoke the breathing of a large brass choir as it approaches the climax of the “trio” section. A variety of other cultural anthems and American folk songs and popular idioms interact to form various textures in the finale section, contributing to a multi-layered fanfare. “The Star Spangled Banner” is an ideal subject for exploration in contradictions. For most Americans, the song represents a paradigm of liberty and solidarity against fierce odds, and for others it implies a contradiction between the ideals of freedom and the realities of injustice and oppression. As a culture, it is my opinion that we Americans are perpetually in search of ways to express and celebrate our ideals of freedom – a way to proclaim, “we’ve made it!” as if the very action of saying it aloud makes it so. And for many of our nation’s people, that was the case: through work songs and spirituals, enslaved Africans promised themselves a way out and built up the nerve to endure the most abominable treatment for the promise of a free life. Immigrants from Europe, Central America, and the Pacific have sought out a safe haven here and though met with the trials of building a multi-cultured democracy, continue to find rooting in our nation and make significant contributions to our cultural landscape. In 2014, a tribute to the U.S. National Anthem means acknowledging the contradictions, leaps and bounds, and milestones that allow us to celebrate and maintain the tradition of our ideals.

–Jessie Montgomery

## **Juantio Becenti (b. 1983) ::**

### ***The Glittering World***

“It’s really strange. I just had that desire, almost since I can remember,” Juantio Becenti recalled in an interview for the Navajo Times. Of Diné (Navajo) descent, Becenti grew up in Aneth, Utah, near the Four Corners, Navajo Nation. As a child he would stay late at school to practice on the piano there and took lessons from a teacher who traveled to give him instruction. Driven to absorb all he could, he would order CDs and scores for study, eventually moving toward composing around age twelve. By age fifteen, Becenti received his first commission from the Moab Music Festival. Since then, he has been commissioned by artists Dawn Avery (North American Indian Cello Project), Raven Chacon (Native American Composers Apprenticeship Program), Michael Barrett (New York Festival of Song), amongst others, and had his works performed by the St. Petersburg String Quartet, Chatter, the Claremont Trio at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

“The Glittering World is a piece for string orchestra based on the mythological narrative of how the Navajo People came to be. According to the Navajo origin story, proto-humans emerged from a genesislike void (described as little more than mist) and ascended from various mono-colored underworlds. With each migration these beings became increasingly more complex and “more human,” forced to deal with their own nature as they moved from one world to the next. Each world is represented by a single color until these proto-humans, now demi-gods with their accumulated knowledge, emerge into the Glittering World or “The World of Many Colors.” These precursors of the “Surface Dwelling People” (Navajo People) were tasked with laying the ceremonial groundwork with which to guide the Navajo People in their pursuit of harmony and beauty in all things in this current world.

A major theme in the story of the glittering world is the ascension from one world into the next where the previous world, though initially harmonious, ultimately falls into chaos and is destroyed. I tried stating that concept most explicitly in part A. The row I used to build tension etc. is stated “properly” initially but then “wrong” notes begin to creep in here and there until it breaks down completely at the end. In Navajo thought, especially in weaving, there is a concept of a “spirit line”. Navajo weaving is geometrical and there is an intentional “error” of an unfinished empty line in the geometrical pattern which allows the spirit to move in and out. Otherwise, they say, it would be essentially dead.

I opted to use musical quotations from some of my favorite composers’ works as a means of representing the concept of a glittering world. In Navajo religious thought colors are used symbolically to represent the cosmos, deities, time, etc. Instead of trying to exemplify those ideas I decided to use musical quotations and moments as examples of bursts of light and joy in an internal world (not necessarily a cosmic one as the concept of the glittering world is in Navajo thought). For example, my first exposure to dissonance on a large scale was the Shostakovich string quartets when I was 17; immediately before I wrote my piece “Hane”. I acquired the Emerson Quartets recording of Shostakovich: Complete String Quartets and I was completely floored. Listening to those quartets brought me so much joy and that feeling is what I tried to highlight here. In terms of the cosmos I used the 12-tone row both as a nod to Schoenberg but again to Shostakovich who used it differently than Schoenberg.

I chose to quote Debussy’s “The Sunken Cathedral” to close *The Glittering World* because of the story behind that piece. It depicts the rising of the cathedral (world) through the haze and mist into a “glittering” statement of joy. Learning about music has been a difficult yet rewarding journey for me as I am self-taught.

When I first began writing I was 11 or so and I eagerly copied the composers I was listening to at the time, unsure if I'd ever be able to write anything comparable. The realization that I am able to appreciate the inherent beauty in music and in fact can write something along those lines (as I did with "Hane") is a world realized. It's like the joyous bells ringing in the sunken cathedral. At its core this music is about celebration, and I hope the few musical lines I quoted will propel that idea forward."

-*Juantio Becenti*

**Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) ::  
String Quartet No. 12 in F major,  
arr. Sarah Darling**

In 1891 Antonín Dvořák received an offer he couldn't refuse from Jeanette Thurber, a visionary philanthropist who had recently founded the National Conservatory of Music of America. Her goal was to create a place where all were welcome under a nondiscrimination policy to foster the growth of musical arts at home in the United States—a deliberate effort to keep waves of talented youngsters from going off to Europe to study, live, and work. She also hoped, in an era in which the preoccupation of many European composers was exploring "national" sounds, to discover the answer to the question "What is American music?" Thurber recognized that Dvořák's distinctive style came from integrating the sonorities of his native Czech folk music with the broader European concert music tradition and invited him to take an appointment as Artistic Director and Professor of Composition for what equates to roughly half a million dollars today. Dvořák, along with his wife and two children, set sail and arrived in New York City on September 26, 1892.

In his quest to find the American spirit in music, Dvořák collaborated with Black students at the conservatory, including Henry Thacker Burleigh, who introduced him to the spirituals and plantation songs of enslaved peoples, and with *New York Tribune* music critic Henry Krehbiel, who provided transcriptions of Indigenous North American melodies. Dvořák

asserted that the elements found in these traditions were the sounds that would form the foundation of a uniquely American music, including, as his biographer Klaus Döge recorded, "...pentatonism in the melodic line, a flattened leading note, plagal cadences, drone accompaniment, rhythmic ostinato, and strongly syncopated rhythms." Fast-forward to American music in the 20th century and beyond, and Dvořák was right.

While Dvořák's time in the United States was musically fruitful, it was in certain ways personally unfulfilling. He was never at ease in New York City, and his generously compensated position became untenable by 1895, when Thurber found she could not pay his full salary due to economic difficulties. However, there was one place the composer called an "ideal spot" during his tenure in this country: a small town in Iowa called Spillville with a large Czech immigrant population, where he spent the summer of 1893. There he wrote two chamber pieces that would become among his most beloved, the String Quartet in F major and the String Quintet in E-flat major, both known by the nickname "American."

The starring role, presenting the memorable opening melody of the quartet, was given to the viola, the instrument Dvořák won one of his first jobs (in a dance band) with after completing music school. If the opening movement captures Dvořák's impression of the vastness of the American midwestern landscape with its optimism of opportunity, the melancholic second movement is perhaps a song of homesickness felt by the composer, dovetailed with an immigrant's nostalgia for a life left behind. In the third movement, consensus suggests that we hear a local birdsong in the repeated high pitched warble played by the first violin. A largely high spirited and energetic finale brings the work to a rousing conclusion.

-*Kathryn Bacasmot, program note annotator*