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*Gabriel Knights-Herrera*  
SENIOR RECITAL



*April 23, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.*



CAL STATE SAN BERNARDINO

# *Program*

Gabriel Knights-Herrera, *composer*

April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025

## *New Music Chamber Orchestra*

Veronica Manzanera, *conductor*

*Song for the Willows* (2020)

*Lightshards* (2022)

- I. "Moon-shadow"
- II. "Dusk's Light"
- III. "Dawnbreak"
- IV. "Sunglow"

Priscilla Ibarra, *violin*

Gabriel Knights-Herrera, *viola*

*In the Ruins of a Temple* (2024)

## *Aetherius Quartet*

Amy Macias, *violin I*

Edgar Villegas, *violin II*

Gabriel Knights-Herrera, *viola*

Addy Epstein, *cello*

String Quartet (2025)

- I. Adagio lamentoso
- II. Andante misterioso
- III. Tempo di valse

# *New Music Chamber Orchestra*

Veronica Manzanera, *conductor*

## **1<sup>ST</sup> VIOLIN**

Priscilla Ibarra

Amy Macias

Anna Caracosa

## **2<sup>ND</sup> VIOLIN**

Edgar Villegas

Heather Lee

Susan Felix

## **VIOLA**

Gabriel Knights-Herrera

Adam Arroyo

Sally McGill

## **CELLO**

Addy Epstein

Karina Gomez-Torres

## **DOUBLE BASS**

James McConnell

## **FLUTE**

Sierrah Perez

## **CLARINET / BASS CLARINET**

Wendi Shaffer

## **BASSOON**

Kellen McNeil

## **SAXOPHONE**

Oscar Muñoz

Daniel Kinoshita

## **PERCUSSION**

Allie Morones

Cristobal Alcaraz

## **PIANO**

Daniel Nuñez



# Program Notes

## *Song for the Willows*

This piece originally took shape as the opening movement of a trio for flute, viola, and cello, however it remains incomplete. These sketches are from about 2019/2020, which was about the time I had started to contemplate the idea of composing music. The inspiration for the initial drafts are based on an art print depicting three skeletal figures. The characters are draped in long, flowing yellow dresses and flower crowns, each playing their own instrument. The original print depicted these characters holding a flute, violin and double bass respectively, however the strings were changed for the trio for more warmth in the sound. Together, they all sit in what looks like a swamp-like environment surrounded by blue butterflies. The narrative the piece follows is how these mysterious figures are improvising laments with each other as they're stuck in a murky swamp with only each other and their instruments.

This orchestration recreates these lamenting figures as a short lyrical intermezzo. This orchestration retains and develops the initial ideas of the trio, building the atmosphere more and adding supplemental textures to portray the dark, foreboding environment. The focus is placed more on the wind section as a reflection of the original art print and the dominance of the flute in the original sketches. The string sections take more of an accompaniment role, building the harmonies and textures underneath the winds before the upper strings restate the melodic material before passing the final statement to the bassoon.

## *Lightshards*

*Lightshards* is a short nocturne suite for violin, viola, and chamber orchestra. This suite originally took form in a short piano suite that was written early 2022, which was during the time I had started to seriously study and work on music composition. The suite is inspired by a combination of the simplistic beauty of Chopin's fourth piano Prelude in E minor, and the harmonic language Olivier Messiaen used for the fifth movement, "Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus" of his renowned *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*.

I had found that Messiaen's ability to create delicate and smooth lyricism with dissonance to be fascinating, which encouraged me to explore more the idea of chromaticism and purposeful dissonance more in my own music, as I tended to stay very tonal. As this suite was part of initial experiments in chromaticism, it is filled with numerous suspensions as my tendency towards strict tonality would often cause me to switch between dissonant and consonant chords. The choice for solo violin and viola is to

mirror Messiaen's use of the cello and piano for his fifth movement, but to also focus more on the nuance of dissonance that comes with orchestral string instruments, and how instruments, such as the viola, can use their warmth to round out dissonance, making it more appealing.

The structure of the suite is such that the solo violin and viola are given the opportunity to collaborate together, but also so that they are able to showcase their musicianship independently of another. The outer movements have the soloists working together, while the inner movements give opportunities for true soloistic playing, with the violin leading the second movement, and viola the third. The first two movements create textures reminiscent of that found in Chopin's prelude. The strings' portato strokes help create the soft texture for the soloists to sing over with the winds providing short bursts of a countermelody, and the percussion acting as a foil with their bright resonance. The texture changes in the third movement, with the strings providing a mixture of tremolo and pizzicato accompaniment to create a more eerie, mysterious tone underneath the soloist. The final movement then focuses on warmth, bringing in the percussion once again this time the marimba laying down a blanket of sound for the ensemble to build off of. The violin harmonics act as short, brief foils to cut the richness of the ensemble as the soloists sing their doleful melodies.

### *In the Ruins of a Temple*

*In the Ruins of a Temple* is a short lyrical poem for chamber orchestra that is inspired by a mixture of Rococo artist Hubert Robert's painting, "A Hermit Praying in the Ruins of a Roman Temple" and modern video game composer Koichi Sugiyama.

The intersection of these two different pieces comes in how they both handle themes of religion. In Robert's painting, he depicts a hermit praying in front of a crucifix, which juxtaposes the dilapidated Roman temple his altar is made in. Sugiyama's work also incorporates themes of religion as his compositions for the video game *Dragon Quest IX* reflect the overarching religious undertones the game's plot has and how it also pulls influence from Christianity. The piece specifically "*In the Ruins of a Temple*" draws from is his orchestration of his composition "*Angelic Land*," which in the game plays in a location known as "the Observatory," which acts as a hub for a set of angel-like characters. Listeners can hear the combination of religious and pop musical elements that create an overall stoic, yet serene piece that portrays imagery of church sanctuaries bathed in colored light pouring through stained glass.

*In the Ruins of a Temple* blends elements from these two artists to create a unique narrative that focuses on the Hermit depicted in Robert's art piece. The piece slowly builds the atmosphere depicted in the portrait, seeking to grasp the grand stillness of an abandoned, ruined

temple. Stoicism is combined with a tinge of sorrow as a way to reflect the Hermit's prayers. The melody begins sorrowful and mystifying as the Hermit completes his daily prayers, almost regretfully as he wishes for a more grandeur altar away from the old religion. The melody grows as his prayers as he endures the harassment brought on by his onlooking thieves, not losing focus. A short string interlude brings about a short respite, the Hermit adds in another prayer asking for forgiveness and mercy on behalf of his onlookers. The work then ends with a final restatement of the initial melody as a final prayer by the Hermit to act as a promise to stay devoted to his faith.

### **String Quartet**

With this string quartet, the goal was to create music that reflects a personal interpretation of various fairy-tale scenes. The opening movement is a mournful lament, evoking the feeling a protagonist may feel when losing their beloved. The following andante is more loose in interpretation, focusing on chromatics to evoke a sense of uncertainty, and mystery. The imagery evoked is that of a dark forest, filled with unknown creatures and hostile flora, or that of a witch's hut where you'd bargain for your deepest desire at a grave cost. The final movement takes the form of a waltz in a combination of a rondo and rounded binary form. The main accompaniment figure deviates from the standard waltz accompaniment in order to create an ominous and icy mood. This comes together with the various themes to create a waltz that combines nostalgia and fear to evoke ballroom parties from ages long gone.

The overall architecture of the quartet creates a small mirror effect. The outer movements are written in a rounded binary form, both with short recapitulations. The second movement acts as the mirror point, where the movement reflects on itself with the third movement mimicking the first by being written in a rounded binary. With the second movement, the mirror begins after the short chorale passage, rebuilding the textures and motifs used in the preceding phrases. The motifs are restated in reverse order in different voices until the mirror eventually returns to the initial theme back in the first violin, which is supported by a similar texture as the opening.

# Bios



**Gabriel Knights-Herrera** is a graduating student at California State University, San Bernardino where he will be receiving a Bachelor of Music in Viola Performance under Dr. Lucy Lewis and has received supplemental music composition studies under Dr. Kevin Zhang.

As a performer, Gabriel holds the principal viola position in the CSUSB Symphony Orchestra, and has performed with the Coachella Valley Symphony and Temecula Valley Symphony under Maestro John Mario di Constanzo and is currently the principal violist for the Southland Symphony Orchestra under Dr. Sylvia Mann. He is also an active chamber musician, having studied modern and historical practices with Dr. Lucy Lewis, Dr. Wen-Ting Huang, Dr. Jessica Getman, and Dr. Esther Back.

As a composer, Gabriel is an active member of the CSUSB New Music ensemble where he works with fellow composers in premiering his own compositions as well as premiering new works. Significant premieres include a graphic score collaboration, *Rotting Away*, with violinist/composer/artist Priscilla Ibarra. The composition was featured at “*Mortification*,” an art exhibit hosted by Priscilla Ibarra at the Garcia Center in San Bernardino, California in 2023. Other significant premieres include his first orchestral suite, “*Acrylic Dreams*,” which was premiered by the CSUSB Symphony Orchestra in 2024 under the direction of Dr. Lucy Lewis. Currently, Gabriel is also preparing for the premiere of his first commission with the string program *Musical!* in San Jacinto, California.

In the future as a composer, Gabriel plans to continue to develop his compositional skills and to consistently collaborate more with student music programs so he can write music that targets the needs of modern classrooms. He also plans to continue writing a wide variety of chamber music for both young and professional musicians.



**Priscilla Ibarra** is currently a second-year Master of Music in Performance student at the Conservatory of Music in the University of Redlands under the tutelage of Professor Samuel Fischer. She graduated from California State University, San Bernardino in 2023 with a Bachelor of Music in Performance having studied under Dr. Lucy Lewis, and a Bachelor of Art in Studio Art with a concentration in painting.

As an orchestral musician, Priscilla has had several unique opportunities to work with prestigious orchestras. In April of 2019, Priscilla was one of several student musicians selected to perform Gustav Holst’s *The Planets* alongside the San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra. In 2023,

Priscilla had the opportunity to travel to South Korea with the CSUSB Chamber Orchestra to perform in the Seoul Arts Centre IBK Chamber Hall. Currently, she performs alongside the Coachella Valley Symphony under Maestro John Mario di Constanzo.

Apart from performing, Priscilla also cultivates her own music composition skills. As a composer, she has written several pieces for her podcast *Dracul*, which she created in 2018 and has accumulated an international audience. Priscilla also has shown interest in graphic composition and notation, having premiered her first graphic composition, *Rotting Away*, in April 2023. The premiere was part of a music installation during her art exhibition, *Mortification*, that was held in the The Garcia Center of the Arts in San Bernardino, California. Along with her personal rendition of the score, she collaborated with her colleague Gabriel Knights-Herrera on another interpretation of *Rotting Away*.

Currently, Priscilla is expanding her violin repertoire with Mariachi music to get back in touch with her cultural roots. She plays as a violinist with the Mariachi Tierras Rojas under the instruction of Cindy Shea, founder of Mariachi Divas. She has been invited to perform a violin and viola duet by Knight-Herrera, to record a chamber piece by composition peer Michael Staff, and has recorded commissioned pieces by working television-show composer, Edwin De Paz. In the future, Priscilla hopes to soon publish her first historic-fiction novel with a promising potential for a sequel.



**Veronica Manzanera** is an Inland Empire based oboist and conductor. Manzanera has been the Assistant Conductor of the San Bernardino Symphony Youth Orchestra since its establishment in 2024. During her undergraduate career, Manzanera performed as principal oboist in various ensembles and had opportunities to conduct the CSUSB Symphonic Band, CSUSB Chamber Singers, and the CSUSB Symphony Orchestra and has since graduated with a Bachelor in music. Manzanera has studied conducting with Dr. Nicholas Bratcher, Dr. Lesley Leighton, and Dr. Lucy Lewis. During the Summer of 2022, she was accepted into Sofia Symphonic Summit, where she participated in master classes led by Simeon Pironkoff, and conducted the world premier of *Ya Leili Ya Lian* by William Blacklaw performed by the Sofia Philharmonic. Manzanera has conducted the premieres of various works including works by composers Adam Arroyo and Gabriel Knights-Herrera. In December of 2022, Manzanera was one of two students chosen to conduct the San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra, marking her national conducting debut. Manzanera plans to further her education by pursuing a masters in conducting while acting as a highschool band director.