Japan Society presents

Noh-opera / Noh-tation: Decoding John Cage’s Unrealized Project

Thurs. Nov. 16 at 5:15 pm (preview) and 7:30 pm (world premiere)
—7:30 pm performance followed by an artist Q&A

2023—2024 Performing Arts Season Support

The season is made possible by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

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John Cage’s Japan Series – Program #3

Support for John Cage’s Japan is generously provided by Doug and Teresa Peterson and the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional support from Nancy and Joe Walker, and the Nomura Foundation.

Support for the international travel of Tomomi Adachi and Wakako Matsuda for Noh-opera / Noh-tation is provided by The Japan Foundation.

Out of Bounds: Japanese Women Artists in Fluxus

Out of Bounds: Japanese Women Artists in Fluxus is the first exhibition to fully explore the contributions of four pioneering artists—Shigeko Kubota (1937-2015), Yoko Ono (b. 1933), Takako Saito (b. 1929) and Mieko Shiom (b. 1938)—to Fluxus, a transnational network of artists, composers and poets that began in the early 1960s. Inspired by earlier avant-garde movements, such as Dadaism, and the experimental work of Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, Fluxus artists challenged artistic conventions by embracing humor, chance occurrences, and process over product. Near the 60th anniversary of the movement’s founding, this exhibition contextualizes the essential role that Kubota, Ono, Saito, and Shiomi played in Fluxus art, events, performances, and publishing.

Photo by Teruo Nishiyama, Courtesy of Mieko Shiom
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR’S NOTE

Welcome to the third installment of our John Cage’s Japan series!

Before this project was conceived, I generally knew that Cage had been planning a piece called Noh-opera that was never materialized. I was also aware of the existence of Cage’s letter describing this project, addressed to the late famed Japanese conductor Hiroyuki Iwaki (although I had never seen it)—but, my knowledge was nothing more than that. So, when Tomomi Adachi, whom I asked to serve as a curator and performer for our fall 2023 John Cage’s Japan series, brought up the then-still-premature idea of realizing this Noh-opera, I had yet to learn what information he would be able to base this project on.

Tomomi introduced me to a book entitled MUSICAGE: CAGE MUSES on Words * Art * Music, written by Joan Retallack and based around conversations between the author and John Cage. Laura Kuhn, Executive Director of the John Cage Trust, also shared with me Cage’s letter addressed to Marcel Duchamp’s wife. Both of these readings offered interesting facts about Noh-Opera’s plan and its background—such as: It was Iwaki who originally suggested to Cage the idea of creating a piece to be titled “Noh-opera”; Cage hoped to get financial support to develop Noh-opera from Seiji Tsutsumi, founder of The Saison Foundation in Japan, an organization with which Japan Society has maintained a close relationship and received financial support from over many years; and, Cage didn’t like that Andrew Culver, his collaborator, joked about Noh-opera as “No · hope · ra” and therefore decided to insert a hyphen between “h” and “o;” etc. However, the most intriguing thing was found in a transcription of a conversation between Cage and Retallack, that she quotes in her book:

JR: How would the Eastern elements enter into this (Noh-opera)?
JC: None of the questions that you might ask can be answered (laughter).
This conversation occurred in July 1982, a month before Cage’s passing.

Now, three decades later, here is Adachi’s decoding. We are very excited to give birth to Cage’s unrealized project! I hope you enjoy this world premiere.

Yoko Shioya
Artistic Director

John Cage’s Japan Series – Program #3

Noh-opera / Noh-tations 1&2

Conception, direction, composition and text by Tomomi Adachi
Voice: Gelsey Bell
Noh actor: Wakako Matsuda
Electronics and Voice: Tomomi Adachi
Lighting Designer: Hideaki Tsutsui

International Contemporary Ensemble:
Flute: Isabel Lepanto Gleicher
Oboe: James Austin Smith
Clarinet: Kristina Teuschler
Bassoon: Rebekah Heller
Trombone: Michael Lormand

International Contemporary Ensemble Staff:
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Production & Communications Manager: Isabel Crespo Pardo
Development Administrator: Remi Shimode
Director of Recordings: Jacob Greenberg
Below is a reproduction of John Cage's letter outlining plans for Noh-opera, sent to Japanese conductor Hiroyuki Iwaki.

25 April 1988

Hiroyuki Iwaki/Tokyo Concerts
14 Sugacho, Shinjuku-ku
Tokyo 160 JAPAN

Dear Yuki,

I now have an idea for Noh-opera. Its subtitle is: or The Complete Musical Works of Marcel Duchamp. The works are five in number: 1) the songs taken from a hat to be sung by himself with his sisters; 2) the toy train which, in this case, would receive (instead of coal) excerpts from Nohdrama and European Opera; 3) Sculpture Musicale; 4) Inframince (the sound of corduroy against corduroy); 5) the Manual of Instructions for Etants Donnés (taking something apart and then putting it back together again).

If you like the idea for Noh-opera I would begin my composition of it. This would include all the aspects of theatre, though I would like the choreography for: the inframince (4) done by Merce Cunningham. I would also like the assistance of Andrew Culver for programming and lighting. (We developed a program for Europeras 1 & 2 which was great before the opera house burned; later the lighting was imitated rather than duplicated.) I would also like to have a Japanese assistant, someone experienced in terms of Noh (not as an actor but as an historian and observer). David Tudor or Takehisa Kosugi would be great for one or two versions of the Sculpture Musicale. I also want to make one of my own. (I would be the composer of the entire work but almost nothing, or very little, would be by me.) The Etant Donnés would not be a replica of the original Duchamp work. It would be a chance-determined tensegrity structure designed, I hope, by Andrew Culver, which would be “taken apart and put back together again.”

Europeras 1 & 2 was successfully done in Frankfurt and could be done in Tokyo by the Frankfurt Company. Or a new production could be made in Japan after December ’88.

Let me know what you think.

As ever.

John Cage
101 W. 18th St.
New York, N.Y. 10011

cc: Paul Matisse               David Tudor
     Anne d’Harmoncourt         Takehisa Kosugi
     Teeny Duchamp              Andrew Culver
     Yoshioki Tono              Merce Cunningham

DIRECTOR’S NOTE

Noh-opera was the last planned large-scale theater project by John Cage. Although this project was never realized in his lifetime, Cage left behind several notes detailing his ideas for this piece. Some of his documented ideas include the participation of a noh expert, a complete performance of Marcel Duchamp’s sound works (or a reworking of Duchamp’s Étant donnés) and the use of Andrew Culver’s sound sculpture. Based on these documents, it may be possible to loosely realize Cage’s vision. However, while starting from Cage’s ideas, what I am trying to do here is to realize Noh-opera as Tomomi Adachi’s work in 2023, rather than Cage’s would-be work in 1992. The title I have given this work is Noh-opera/Noh-tations 1&2.

One of my main interests in Cage is his handling of scores as a “catalyst” for performance and his methodology of notation. To create my Noh-opera, I adapted the structure developed for Cage’s Europeras 3&4 that I presented in the Japan premiere of this work last year, which incorporated noh performers. As additional aids, I referred to Cage’s notations used for Song Books, Variation V and various other pieces of his. Yet, the fundamental difference is that, while most of these Cage pieces employ chance operations, mine does not. Instead, I have thoroughly adopted artificial intelligence to build the content for this work.

For the two operas I wrote prior to this piece, I let artificial intelligence write all the librettos, whereas for Noh-opera/Noh-tations 1&2, AI had greater influence in determining all program codes that wrote sound material, score, text and detailed instructions for performers to follow. When it is performed, the sound you listen to is “music written by Marcel Duchamp” as generated by AI; the score that the instrumentalists use is comprised of different signatures of Marcel Duchamp’s name forged by AI and placed into staff notation, and all the texts that are pronounced are Zen koans, or paradoxical riddles, written by AI. The koan challenges whether artificial intelligence can create paradoxes.

The I-Ching, on which Cage’s chance operations were based, is originally a divination book that deals with the relationship between human beings and events beyond human knowledge or understanding. Following this concept, doesn’t it make sense to substitute the I-Ching with AI as a source which has the potential to surpass human intelligence? In fact, I even think that Cage’s use of chance operations indicated the future relationship between artificial intelligence and artists.

Furthermore, advancing the idea of a “time bracket,” which Cage employed in his later years, Noh-opera/Noh-tations 1&2 proceeds with a chain of each performer’s subjective sense of passing time, with passages and directions set to take place in sequence over subjective periods of time. Cage’s idea of the sound sculpture is also replaced by a sound control system operated by a group of ultrasonic sensors that cover the entire stage space, as well as by resonance of the strings on stage. This means that the entire stage becomes one musical instrument and that all the performers are inside of this instrument.

— Tomomi Adachi

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Tomomi Adachi (director, composer, electronics and voice) is a performer, composer, sound poet, instrument builder and visual artist. Known for his versatile style, he has performed his own voice and electronics pieces, sound poetry, improvised music and contemporary music works and also presented site-specific compositions, compositions for classical instrumental ensembles, and choir pieces for untrained musicians. He has performed at many prominent international venues, including Tate Modern (London, UK), MaerzMusik (Berlin, Germany), Hamburger Bahnhof Museum (Berlin, Germany), Centre Pompidou (Paris, France) and Poesiefestival Berlin (Germany). He uses a wide range of materials in his work, including self-made physical interfaces and instruments, artificial intelligence, brain waves, artificial satellite, Twitter texts, fractures and even paranormal phenomena. Adachi presents an intermedia space which is composed of the acts of seeing, reading, listening to and touching texts using audio, visuals, holograms and 3D printing. He also performs vocal, live-electronics or performance works by other composers such as John Cage, Cornelius Cardew, Christian Wolff, Tom Johnson, Dieter Schnebel, TAKAHASHI Yuji, YUASA Joji and others who belonged to Fluxus. Adachi’s major projects on John Cage’s work include
**Variations VII, Europera 5 and Waterwalk.** Most recently, he directed Cage's late work, *Europeras 3 & 4*, commissioned and presented by Aichi Triennale 2022.

**Gelsey Bell** (voice) is a Brooklyn-based singer, songwriter and scholar. She has been described by *The New York Times* as “one of New York’s most adventurous musicians” and “a charismatic and fiercely intelligent performer.” She is a core member of thingNY, Varispeed and The Chutneys. Her recent works include m:un[ning] (morning/mourning) (2023), presented in the Prototype Festival; From the Soil Back to the Soil (2023) for The Daxophone Consort; Cairns (2020), a soundwalk for Green-Wood Cemetery that was commissioned by HERE; shuffleyamamba: Yamamba as a Bear (2021), created with choreographer Yasuko Yokoshi; thingNY's SubtracTTTTTTTTT (2020); and Skylightght (2019), created with saxophonist Erin Rogers. Performance highlights also include Dave Malloy’s *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* (Broadway) and Ghost Quartet, Robert Ashley's *Improvement* and Crash, Kate Soper’s *Here Be Sirens*, and various works by Darius Jones, John King, Jay Afrisando and others. She has released multiple albums on Gold Bolus Recordings. She has had residencies at the HERE Arts Center, Pioneer Works and the Kinosaki Arts Center in Japan, and awards from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Opera America, Japan Foundation and others. She has a Ph.D. from New York University in Performance Studies, and is part-time faculty at The New School.

**Wakako Matsuda** (noh actor) was born in Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture as the eldest daughter of Hosho School noh actor Yonosuke Watanabe. Matsuda began her training under her father and grandfather at the age of three and started performing as a child actor at a young age. Her notable performances of noh plays include Midare (2008) and Shakkyo (2018). She has also performed overseas, including the “friendship” performance of *Funa Benkei at Theater Sopukka in Finland (1994) and Kocho at Chongdong Theater in South Korea (2005)*. Matsuda’s recent noteworthy performances include *Tama no Dan*, part of a special performance series for female noh actors hosted by the National Noh Theatre commemorating the 50th anniversary of National Theatre (2016), *Izutsu*, a candelilt noh theater series hosted by Kenrokuen Area Cultural Zone (2017) and *Funa Benkei* in the Kitaguni Hosho Noh series (2018). She has been actively participating in the National Noh Theater’s female noh actor series, including the recent live-streamed performance of *Nonomiya* in 2021. In 2022, she performed John Cage’s *Europera 3&4*, directed by Tomomi Adachi, at the Aichi International Triennale. Matsuda graduated from Tokyo University of the Arts, Department of Traditional Music and went on to complete a master’s degree in Noh Acting from the University. In 2014, she was designated as an Intangible Cultural Property by the Japanese government, and in 2018, she was awarded a Cultural Activities Award by the city of Kanazawa. Matsuda is a long-time member of The Nohgaku Performers’ Association and was elected to the Board of Directors of the Association in 2022.

**Isabel Lepanto Gleicher** (flute) has been called “excellent” by *The New York Times*. Gleicher is a member of the International Contemporary Ensemble, Wild Up, new music sinfonietta Ensemble Échappé, conductor-less orchestra One Found Sound and the band ShoutHouse. She is also a founding member of Song Sessions Collective, a collective of improvisers who create an ever-changing work based on the structure of whale songs through the use of flutes, clarinets, sine-tones and an LED light installation. You can hear Gleicher featured on several albums: Wild Up's latest Grammy nominated album *Julius Eastman Vol. 2: Joy Boy and Julius Eastman Vol. 1: Feminine*, as well as composer Anna Thorvaldsdottir’s *Aequa*, the Ilaria Kaila and Aizuri String Quartet album *The Bells Bow Down*, synth driven post-rock band Infinity Shred’s *Shred Offline*, and Indie rock band San Fermin’s *The Cormorant and Jackrabbit*. Gleicher earned an MM degree in Contemporary Performance from the Manhattan School of Music, an MM degree from the Yale School of Music and a BM degree from SUNY Purchase Conservatory of Music. In the summer of 2023, Gleicher competed on season 25 of the CBS reality TV show *Big Brother*. She was evicted in an 8-1 vote on day 44 wearing a pig costume.

**James Austin Smith** (oboe) is a chamber musician, curator and on-stage host praised for his “virtuosic,” “dazzling,” and “brilliant” performances (*The New York Times*) and his “bold, keen sound” (*The New Yorker*), and is driven by the communicative nature of live performance. He appears regularly at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, leading national and international chamber music festivals, at Carnegie Hall and on tour as Co-Principal Oboe of the conductor-less Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and as an artist of the International Contemporary Ensemble. As Artistic and Executive Director of Tertulia Chamber Music,
Smith creates intimate evenings of food, drink and music designed to engage audiences hungry for singular cultural experiences in New York, San Francisco and Serenbe, Georgia, as well as an annual weekend festival of food and music in a variety of global destinations. He mentors graduate-level musicians as a professor of oboe and chamber music at Stony Brook University and the Manhattan School of Music, and as a regular guest at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Smith holds a master's degree from the Yale School of Music and bachelor's degrees in political science and music from Northwestern University.

Kristina Teuschler (clarinet) enjoys a versatile career as a performer, producer and curator in New York City. In 2018 she joined the West Point Band, the Army's oldest and premiere performing ensemble as clarinetist and principal bass clarinetist. She maintains an active freelance career while in this post, and recent highlights have included performances with Orchestra of St. Luke's, and Lincoln Center’s multi-media production of Steve Reich’s *New York Counterpoint*. Teuschler frequently records and collaborates with many local independent artists and bands, and performs her own electronic music project that combines songwriting, DJ production, and orchestral excerpts to provide a satirical critique of Western art music. She has co-directed Madison New Music Festival, supporting contemporary music in her home state of Wisconsin since 2016. Teuschler received her Bachelor's Degree from Northwestern University and her Master's Degree from Manhattan School of Music. Her primary teachers were Mark Nuccio, Steven Cohen and J. Lawrie Bloom.

Rebekah Heller (bassoon) aims to expand the sonic possibilities of her instrument—both in her solo work and through a deep collaborative practice. Called “an impressive solo bassoonist” by *The New Yorker*, she has released two acclaimed solo albums of new music written for and with her by a diverse community of composers, and made her solo debut in 2018 with the New York Philharmonic. As bassoonist (since 2008) and former Co-Artistic Director of the International Contemporary Ensemble, Heller has collaborated with hundreds of composers worldwide to make countless groundbreaking new chamber and bassoon solo pieces come to life. Heller has been on the faculty of The Mannes School of Music at The New School since the fall of 2019, where she leads a bassoon studio, co-chairs the wind department, and teaches classes in contemporary repertoire and new music practices.

Mike Lormand (trombone) is a New York City-based trombonist who performs eclectic contemporary and classical music. He is a member of the International Contemporary Ensemble, Talea Ensemble, Weather Vest, IRIS Collective and Riverside Symphony. Lormand’s love for the orchestral repertoire has led to performances with the New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera, Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, The Knights, New York City Ballet, New York City Opera, American Ballet Theater and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Lormand has commissioned numerous new solo works, with notable premiere performances at the Ojai Music Festival, Lincoln Center Out of Doors Festival, and Alice Tully Hall. As an instructor at Brooklyn College and Saint Ann's School, Lormand encourages the development of lasting personal relationships with music, sharing the insights of his teachers: Per Brevig, David Taylor, Marta Hofacre and Bob Schmaltz. Lormand is a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music (MM) and the University of Southern Mississippi (BM).

International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), described as “America's foremost new-music group” (*The New Yorker*), has become a leading force in new music throughout the last 20 years, having premiered over 1,000 works and having been a vehicle for the workshop and performance of thousands of works by student composers across the U.S. The Ensemble's composer-collaborators—many whom were unknown at the time of their first Ensemble collaboration—have fundamentally shaped its creative ethos and have continued on to highly visible and influential careers, including MacArthur Fellow Tyshawn Sorey; long-time Ensemble collaborator, founding member and 2017 Pulitzer Prize-winner Du Yun; and the Ensemble’s founder, 2012 MacArthur Fellow and first-ever flutist to win Lincoln Center’s Avery Fisher Prize, Claire Chase.

A recipient of the American Music Center’s Trailblazer Award and the Chamber Music America/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming, the International Contemporary Ensemble was also named Musical America’s Ensemble of the Year in 2014. The group has served as artist-in-residence at Lincoln Center’s Mostly Mozart Festival (2008-2020), Ojai Music Festival (2015-17) and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2010-2016). In addition, the Ensemble has presented and performed at festivals in the
U.S. such as Big Ears Festival and Opera Omaha’s ONE Festival, as well as abroad, including GMEM-Centre National de Création Musicale (CNCM) de Marseille, Vértice at Cultura UNAM, Warsaw Autumn, International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt and Cité de la Musique in Paris. Other performance stages have included the Park Avenue Armory, ice floes at Greenland’s Diskotek Sessions, Brooklyn warehouses, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and boats on the Amazon River. The ensemble performed in one of Japan Society’s fall 2018 programs, Hidejiro x ICE: Shamisen Evolution.

JOHN CAGE TIMELINE

1912: Born in Los Angeles, California on September 5

1930: Begins composing

1933: Moves to New York, and begins composition lessons with Henry Cowell and Adolph Weiss

1935: Studies with Arnold Schoenberg

1938: Meets Merce Cunningham

1940: Invents the prepared piano technique by placing objects between the instrument’s strings to emulate a percussion ensemble

1942: Meets Marcel Duchamp

1944: Tours with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and pianist David Tudor throughout Europe

Late 1940s – early 1950s: Begins attending lectures on Japanese Zen Buddhism by D. T. Suzuki

1949: Receives awards from The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and The American Academy to travel to Europe

1951: Begins using chance operations in his music, inspired by his relationship to Eastern philosophy and the I Ching, a Chinese classic text, and composes Music of Changes

1952: Composes and premieres 4’33”, marking the admission of silence into Cage’s compositional repertoire

1956: Starts teaching courses at The New School for Social Research in New York City

1959: Includes Toshi Ichiyanagi, who moved to New York in 1962, as one of his students at The New School

1961: Writes first and most widely read book, Silence, in which he states “…without my engagement with Zen… I doubt whether I would have done what I have done.”

1962: Tours Japan for the first time, visits Tokyo, Kyoto, Nara, Osaka, Matsushima, and Sapporo

1964: Visits Japan with Merce Cunningham, concluding the Cunningham Dance Company’s first world tour. Meets Japanese traditional music instrumentalists through the introduction of Toru Takemitsu

1967: Begins incorporating computer-generated chance operations into his compositions

1976: Composes and premieres Renga (連歌), commissioned by the Seiji Ozawa-led Boston Symphony

1979: Visits Japan to participate in the Pan Asian Festival II in Tokyo for the performance of Aria and Song Books

1981: Attends the opening of the Exhibition of Marcel Duchamp at the Museum of Modern Art, Seibu Takanawa, Japan

1981: Cage begins composing Europeras 1 & 2, written by the chance operation method to incorporate all the elements of opera, such as voice, orchestra, costumes, stage props, and lighting

1983: Begins writing Ryoanji, inspired by his initial visit to Ryoanji temple in 1962

1984: Begins working with a computer to make large-scale computer-assisted compositions

1985: Completes Ryoanji

1988: Interviewed about Ryoanji by WNYC at Music from
Japan's concert at Asia Society, New York City; when asked if it is accurate to say that Japan has been an important part of his life and influenced his ideas, Cage responds with “It is.”

(April) 1988:
Writes a letter to conductor Hiroyuki Iwaki to describe intended plans for his project Noh-Opera: Or the Complete Musical Works of Marcel Duchamp (unrealized)

(December) 1988:
Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters

1989:
Visits Japan to receive Kyoto Prize

1992:
Dies on August 12 in New York City, following a stroke

John Cage’s Japan Series concludes with:
CONTEMPORARY MUSIC
Cage Shock:
Homage to His First Japan Visit

In-person (SOLD OUT) Live-streamed (TICKETS AVAILABLE)
Thursday, Dec. 7 at 7:30 pm
—Pre-concert lecture at 6:30 pm
—Followed by a Private Gathering for Artists and Members

Japan Society Performing Arts’ 2023-2024 season continues in January with:
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Wednesday, January 10, 7:30 pm
—Followed by an opening night reception
Friday, January 12, 7:30 pm
—Followed by an artist Q&A
Saturday, January 13 at 2:30 & 7:30 pm

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CONSULTANTS: Keiko Kato, Esq., Law Offices of Keiko Kato, Legal Counsel

PRODUCTION STAFF: Takaaki Ando, Sound & AV Engineer
Marie Yokoyama, Ayumu “Poe” Saegusa, Tsubasa Kamei, Resident Lighting Designers

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Hamlet | Toilet
Written and directed by Yu Murai

CONTEMPORARY THEATER | NEW YORK PREMIERE

“[Yu Murai is] among Japan’s most innovative contemporary playwright-directors...”
—Asian Theatre Journal

Get ready for a night of laughs and literary mashups as Theater Company Kaimoku Pennant Race (KPR) returns to Japan Society with their latest production, Hamlet | Toilet. Founded by the acclaimed playwright and director Yu Murai, KPR has become known for its nonsensical yet profound style that sensationally weaves Japanese pop culture into reimagined scenes from Shakespearean plays.

Presented in partnership with Under the Radar Festival / utrifest.org

Wed., January 10, 7:30 pm
—Followed by an opening night reception

Fri., January 12, 7:30 pm
—Followed by an artist Q&A

Sat., January 13 at 2:30 & 7:30 pm

$35 Nonmembers
$28 Members
$28 Person with Disability

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Cage Shock
Homage to His First Japan Visit

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Director and Performance Artist: Tomomi Adachi
Electronics: Tania Caroline Chen
Electronics: Victoria Shen
Viola: Kyle Ambrust
Cello: Karinka Kleijn
Cello: Michael Nicolas
Trombone: Mike Lormand

Thur., Dec. 7 at 7:30 pm
(in-person and livestreamed)
— Pre-concert lecture at 6:30 pm
— Followed by a Private Gathering for Artists and Members

In-person tickets:
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