

UNIVERSITY *of* MEMPHIS
WIND ENSEMBLE

under the direction of **Dr. Albert Nguyễn**

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29 at 8:30pm



SOUTHERN
DIVISION
CONFERENCE



PROGRAM

Petals of Fire
for Wind Ensemble

Zhou Tian
(b.1981)

Dr. William Plenk, guest conductor

Soul Suite No. 1
for Wind Ensemble

Marie A. Douglas
(b.1981)

Dr. Albert Nguyễn, conductor
Consortium Premiere

Autumn Trilogy
For Soprano and Wind Ensemble

I. Thu Ấm
II. Thu Vịnh
III. Thu Điếu

Việt Cường
(b.1990)
Texts by **Nguyễn Khuyến**
(1834-1909)

Bích-Vân Nguyễn, soprano
Consortium Premiere

Symphony No. 2
"Voices"

James M. Stephenson
(b.1969)

I. Prelude: 'Of Passion'
II. Shouts and Murmurs
III. Of One

Megan Borroughs, mezzo-soprano

UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

WIND ENSEMBLE Dr. Albert Nguyễn, conductor

PERSONNEL

Flute

Catherine Balsamo
Ellie Pappas
Mackenzie Saylor
Delara Hashemi
Samuel Jesuyemi

Oboe

Ty Matthews
Jalen Gales
Jesus Salazar

Bassoon

Christina Hazell
Charles Bridges
Bianna Allen

Clarinet

Fernando Martinez
Evan Erickson
Des Taylor
Emily Ward
Pia Luna Victoria
Ian Greer

Bass Clarinet

Austin Kennedy

Alto Saxophone

Caleb Allen
Andrew Stine

Tenor Saxophone

Matthew Meyers

Baritone Saxophone

C. Joanie Dyer

Double Bass

Kaleb Ritchie

Harp

Frances Cobb

Horn

Jimmy Rhine
James Currence
Rhys Roberts
Madeline Miller

Trumpet

Tyler Helms
Lacey Peschel
Yiming Zhang
Walker Higgins
Oliver Buckley

Trombone

Dylan Mashburn
Cassidy Shiflett-Cockrell
Nathan Hiers
Colin Woods

Bass Trombone

Jasmine Lockwood
Cal Elrod

Euphonium

Sophia Rivera
Alfred Hernandez

Tuba

Bryson Harding
Christopher Gilchrist

Percussion

Mario Shaw
Susannah Clabough
Christian Davis
Overton Alford
Dwight Van de Vate
Erin Duke
Kate Bingham

Piano

Diego Parra

PROGRAM NOTES

Petals of Fire Zhou Tian (b.1981)

Zhou Tian, praised by The Wall Street Journal for highlighting historical contributions often overlooked, his music has been described as "absolutely beautiful," "utterly satisfying," "stunning," and "a prime example of 21st-century global multiculturalism." Zhou's works have been performed by leading orchestras and musicians worldwide, including the New York Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, "The President's Own" US Marine Band, Shanghai Symphony, among many others. Notably, Zhou's Concerto for Orchestra, commissioned by the Cincinnati Symphony, earned him a GRAMMY Award nomination for Best Contemporary Classical Composition in 2018, making him the first Chinese-born composer and the second Asian composer (following Tōru Takemitsu) recognized in that category.

Born into a musical family in Hangzhou, China, Zhou moved to the United States at nineteen and pursued his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music, the Juilliard School, and the University of Southern California. Over the course of his formal education, he studied with Jennifer Higdon, Richard Danielpour, Christopher Rouse, Stephen Hartke, and Donald Crockett. Zhou has held Composition Fellowships from Tanglewood, Aspen, the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau, and the Henri Mancini Institute. Zhou served as an assistant professor at Colgate University before joining Michigan State University as an associate professor in 2016.

Zhou's accolades include a GRAMMY nomination, Sousa-ABA-Ostwald Award, first prize in the ASCAP/Lotte Lehmann Art Song Competition, and three ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers awards. He has also been recognized with an Excellence Award of Large Symphonic Work in the 16th Musical Composition Award given (every five years) by the Ministry of Culture of China and recognition as the Beijing Music Festival's "Artist of the Year" in 2019. His music has graced prestigious venues globally, and he has held composer-in-residence positions with orchestras and institutions such as the Shanghai Symphony and Tianjin Juilliard School. Zhou has made significant contributions outside of symphonic music, composing for film, dance, and crossover genres.

The composer writes the following notes about his work, *Petals of Fire*:

“*Petals of Fire* is a fierce and colorful rhapsody inspired by American artist Cy Twombly's 1989 painting of the same title. Part of the work was adapted from a movement of my *Concerto for Orchestra*. I've always been interested in learning how artists mix different styles and techniques to create a unique, new look. Inspired by Twombly's attempt to combine text and color to express himself visually (literally, words are part of his painting, much like what Chinese painters did during the Song dynasty), I, as a composer, wanted to create a fusion of musical styles, harmony, and timbre, using a large wind ensemble.

In a way, everyone in the ensemble is a "petal": together, the fire glows, disappears, and dances. *Petals of Fire* was commissioned by Michigan State University Wind Symphony and Director of Bands Kevin Sedatole for the 2017 CBDNA National Convention.”

Soul Suite No. 1 Marie A. Douglas (b.1981)

Marie A. Douglas, a composer hailing from Atlanta, has garnered widespread acclaim for her exceptional talent in seamlessly blending genres and textures within her captivating concert stage pieces. Her music serves as a profound reflection of her inner-city upbringing and her diverse musical experiences, infusing a genuine and authentic essence into each composition. Douglas draws significant inspiration from the African Diaspora, effectively integrating elements of hip-hop and western art music idioms to create compositions that resonate with a wide range of audiences. With her works captivating concert-goers across the United States and Canada, Marie's artistry extends beyond the stage as she collaborates with various ensembles and lends her creative prowess to the world of film music, as well as hip hop and r&b. As she embarks on a remarkable academic journey, pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Memphis under the guidance of distinguished mentors Kamran Ince and Albert Nguyen, her unwavering dedication to sonic innovation continues to shape the evolving tapestry of her artistic expression.

The words Soul Suite are an expression that I have used to describe the hip-hop production technique called the “beat switch” where the producer or DJ switches the beat from the current feel to another, within the same track or song. The new feel can be unrelated or related. The transition can be subtle and smoothly executed or jolting and unexpected. Justification for how the switch may occur, and what it contains can range from a stylistic preference to something as fickle as how the composer feels that day. The Soul Suite is also what I have come to call my own compositional technique.

Throughout Soul Suite No. 1, you will encounter figures that are idiomatic of many musical settings, from the western classical music realm, the southern hip-hop production scene, spirituals, as well as elements of gospel and r&b. Specifically from the production side, you will hear moments of distortion, reverb, timpani as 808 drums, trap hi hats, and even a trombone soli in the style of a rap verse. This piece serves as the first installment in a series of compositions which I will create and dedicate to regions of the world honoring cultural staples and historical phenomena within the African diaspora.

The first movement of Soul Suite No. 1 is a tapestry of rhythmic and harmonic intricacies. Comprising three distinct sections— Chopped & Screwed, Maestoso Con Forza, and It's Lit! —this initial movement transports us through a mosaic of intriguing auditory landscapes. Imagine composers like Ligeti, Philip Glass, and Stravinsky stepping into the electrifying ambiance of a Travis Scott or Playboi Carti studio session, and you'll understand the first movement.

The second movement, by contrast, reveals a more introspective facet of the piece. Here, I explore two spirituals, "Wade in the Water" and "Deep River," drawing inspiration from esteemed artists such as Future, Erykah Badu, and Jill Scott. The initial portion of this movement invokes compositional methods reminiscent of Erykah Badu's avant-garde fusion of neo-soul and jazz, intensely interwoven with elements of hip-hop and r&b. Within this sonic journey, the conductor and ensemble encounter aleatoric instructions, guiding them through a realm of musical spontaneity. As the second movement unfolds further, it embraces the spirit of call-and-response, reminiscent of a 19th-century southern black church setting, preparing the listener for the ensuing hymns.

From a programmatic perspective, the music embarks on a narrative voyage, weaving a tale from the annals of African Mythology, specifically drawing from the lore of the Dogon tribe in Mali. This narrative revolves around the Sirius star system and the Nommos people—a cornerstone of the Dogon people's origin story. Within the composition, I endeavor to depict a hypothetical evening based on the aforementioned mythology, where the Dogon tribe was visited and enlightened by the Nommos people. In Dogon mythology, the Nommos are described as having an "aquatic" essence, thus prompting the inclusion of "Wade in the Water" and "Deep River" spirituals in the composition—a symbolic connection to their otherworldly origins.

-Program Notes by the Composer

Autumn Trilogy Việt Cường (b.1990)

Vietnamese-American composer Việt Cường, praised by The New York Times as "alluring" and "wildly inventive," has garnered acclaim globally. His music, commissioned and performed on six continents, has been featured by renowned ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, Eighth Blackbird, Sō Percussion, and Dallas Winds. Cường's diverse compositions have graced prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and the Kennedy Center. Notable for exploring the unexpected and whimsical, he has created works for various ensembles, from middle school bands to Grammy-winning orchestras.

Cường, currently the Pacific Symphony's Composer-in-Residence, has earned numerous awards, including the Barlow Prize, William D. Revelli Prize, and ASCAP Morton Gould Composers Award. As Assistant Professor of Music Composition and Theory at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, he imparts his knowledge in composition, orchestration, and music theory. Cường holds degrees from Princeton University, the Curtis Institute of Music, and the Peabody Conservatory, studying under mentors like Jennifer Higdon and Kevin Puts. His commitment to fostering contemporary music is evident in recent works like "Vital Sines" and "Re(new)al," showcasing his collaborative spirit.

Cường expresses his ideas on Autumn Triptych below:

“Autumn Triptych is a musical setting of three iconic lyric poems by Nguyễn Khuyến (1834-1909), a Vietnamese scholar, teacher, and poet. “Thu Điếu” (Fishing in Autumn), “Thu Vịnh” (Writing on Autumn), and “Thu Ẩm” (Drinking in Autumn) form a melancholy collection of verses written in response to the colonization of Vietnam in the late 19th century. I was first introduced to Nguyễn’s poems six years ago when composer P.Q. Phan invited me to compose a vocal piece with a chamber ensemble accompaniment for the Vietnamese American Society for Creative Arts and Music (VASCAM). I sought advice from my father on a text to set, and he recommended one of his favorite poems, “Thu Điếu.”

Vietnamese was my first language, and I spoke no English until I was five, but over the years I had all but completely lost my mother tongue. I knew that the song’s melody would need to be shaped by the tonality of the language, so I relied heavily on my father to make sure that my setting preserved the language of the original verse. Though my father had no training as a musician, he was indispensable in helping me to hone the piece. The full wind ensemble version of “Thu Điếu,” commissioned by the US Army Field Band in 2021, was the last project I completed before his death, and in the years since his passing the song’s melody invariably brings him to mind. His absence was felt all the more keenly as I completed the other two songs for the Triptych this year.

In writing the music for “Writing” and “Drinking,” I felt a greater connection to my Vietnamese heritage than perhaps I ever have. Though my brother Nam and I are named in commemoration of our parents’ homeland, it was not a culture we were raised in. A Vietnamese man even once approached me after a concert to say that he had been listening for the sound of Vietnam in my music but had only been able to hear the Blue Ridge Mountains. It is my hope that in these three pieces, the listener might hear some of both, and perhaps in Autumn.”

Thơ Nguyễn Khuyến

Dịch giả/ Translator: Lộc Lê tự Lộc Hồ Đề

Thu Ẩm

Năm gian nhà cỏ thấp le te
Ngõ tối đêm sâu đóm lập loè
Lung giậu phát phơ màu khói nhạt
Làn ao lóng lánh bóng trăng loe

Da trời ai nhuộm mà xanh ngắt?
Mắt lão không vầy cũng đỏ hoe
Rượu tiếng rằng hay, hay chẳng mấy
Độ năm ba chén đã say nhè

Thu Vịnh

Trời thu xanh ngắt mấy tầng cao,
Cần trúc lơ phơ gió hắt hiu.
Nước biếc trông như tầng khói phủ,
Song thưa để mặc bóng trăng vào.

Mấy chùm trước giậu hoa năm ngoái,
Một tiếng trên không ngỗng nước nào?
Nhân hứng cũng vừa toan cất bút,
Nghĩ ra lại thẹn với ông Đào.

Thu Điếu

Ao thu lạnh lẽo nước trong veo
Một chiếc thuyền câu bé tèo tèo
Sóng nước theo làn hơi gợn tí
Lá vàng trước gió sẽ đưa vèo
Từng mây lơ lửng trời xanh ngắt
Ngõ trúc quanh co khách vắng teo
Tựa gối ôm cần lâu chẳng được
Cá đâu đớp động dưới chân bèo

Drinking in Autumn

Five grass-huts that are low-to-the-ground sort of dwellings
Fireflies flicker in the dark alley late evening
Around the mid of the hedges, veils of light smoky color are floating
Pond ripples glitter under the flashy moonlight

Who dyed the sky in bright blue?
This old man's eyes aren't rubbed but still of red hue
My esteemed reputation in handling liquor, not so true
Just about three to five shots, already I am incoherently drunk.

Poetry of Autumn

Deep blue sky of Autumn reaches several levels high,
Sparse miniature bamboo sticks sway in the gentle breeze.
Blueish water appears like a layer of smoke cover,
Scantly barred window readily lets in the moonlight.

Several clusters of last year flowers hang around the front hedge,
A single honk of a goose echoes in the air, from which country is it now?
With inspiration, I am about to put my pen to paper,
But then I think of Mr. Đào, I feel inadequate.

Fishing in Autumn

The fall pond chillingly cold, the water crystal clear
A fishing boat, tiny it appears
Rolling waves through the mist, ripple a little
Yellow leaves in the wind, quietly glide fast
From a deep blue sky hang rows of clouds
On a bamboo path, no one around
Resting on knees, holding the pole for a long time without bites
Somewhere the fishes are, tugging under the duckweed sites.

Symphony No. 2 James M. Stephenson (b.1969)

“Voices”

Renowned Chicago-based composer James M. Stephenson has received critical acclaim and widespread recognition for his melodically rich music and described by Musical America as "astonishingly inventive" has a diverse music catalog encompassing four symphonies, approximately thirty concertos and sonatas for various instruments, as well as an acclaimed comedic opera. Stephenson's music has received premieres from prestigious ensembles, including The Chicago Symphony, San Francisco Ballet, Boston Pops, and "The President's Own" US Marine Band.

A self-taught composer and former trumpeter in the Naples Philharmonic, Stephenson's individual voice and prolific output earned him the moniker "The Concerto King." His compositions have been recorded on over 30 CDs, covering a range of instruments and genres as The Boston Herald raved about "straightforward, unabashedly beautiful sounds," suggesting "Stephenson deserves to be heard again and again!"

Stephenson's expertise extends to conducting, with engagements that include leading orchestras such as Traverse Symphony, Chattanooga Symphony, and Modesto Symphony. Additionally, he served as Composer-in-Residence for the Lake Forest Symphony, showcasing his versatility as an arranger and conductor. An alumnus of the New England Conservatory, Stephenson emphasizes the importance of the individual's voice in music through his work in education and university outreach. Amid his career Stephenson strives to shape a life that revolves around family, composing, conducting, and a passion for assorted activities, including travel, athletics, and savoring good wine with friends.

On his Symphony No. 2 "Voices", Stephenson writes:

"On April 23, 2016, my mother, Shirley S. Stephenson, passed away, at the age of 74. It was the first time anyone that close to me had died, and I honestly didn't know how to respond. As this new piece - the symphony - was the next major work on my plate, I thought the music would come pouring forth, as one would imagine in the movies, or in a novel.

However, the opposite happened, and I was stuck, not knowing how to cope, and not knowing what to write. Eventually, after a month or so, I sat at the piano, and pounded a low Eb octave, followed by an anguished chord answer. I did this three times, with three new response-chords, essentially recreating how I felt. This became the opening of the symphony...I vowed I wouldn't return to Eb (major) until the end of the piece, thus setting forth a compositional and emotional goal all at once: an Eb to Eb sustaining of long-term tension, technically speaking, and the final arrival at Eb major being a cathartic and powerful personal moment, when I finally would come to terms with the loss of my mother.

The voice in the piece is that of my mother, an untrained alto, which is why I ask for it without vibrato. In the end, she finally sings once last time, conveying to me that "all will be ok".

I think it is the most difficult times we endure that force us, inspire us, to dig deeper than we could ever imagine. On the one hand, I am, of course, deeply saddened by the loss of my mother; but on the other, I will always have this piece - which is the most personal to me - to in essence keep her alive in my heart. I always tear up at letter I. Always. But they are tears of joy and treasured memories of 74 years with my mother."

BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Albert Nguyễn Conductor



Albert Nguyễn is the Director of Bands and Head of the Conducting Area at the University of Memphis. He currently holds the Pearl Wales Professorship in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the University of Memphis in the areas of teaching, creative activity, and service. Dr. Nguyễn's responsibilities include overseeing all aspects of the University Bands program, conducting the Wind Ensemble, leading the graduate wind conducting program, and serving as the Executive Director of the University of Memphis Summer at the Scheidt Program. Ensembles under Dr. Nguyễn's direction have performed at the CBDNA Southern Regional Conference, the TNMEA All-State Conference, and Internationally in Austria and Italy. As a conductor and clinician, he has worked with ensembles and students throughout the United States, including the Mid-South as well as California, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, South Carolina, and Texas. For his contribution to the University of Memphis's educational, research, outreach, and service missions, Dr. Nguyễn was a recipient of the First Tennessee Professorship.

Dr. Nguyễn began his professional teaching career as the Director of Bands at Morrilton High School in Morrilton, AR. He holds the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Music Education from Arkansas Tech University and the Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts in wind conducting from The University of Texas at Austin. He is a member of Kappa Kappa, Psi, Tau Beta Sigma, Phi Beta Mu, and serves the College Band Directors National Association as a member of the Diversity Committee.

Dr. William Plenk Guest Conductor

Dr. William Plenk is Associate Director of Bands and Director of Athletic Bands for the Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music at the University of Memphis. In this role, he oversees the UofM Marching Band and Pep Band, conducts the Symphonic Band, and teaches music education courses. Dr. Plenk also serves as Associate Director for Academic Programs, administering undergraduate curriculum and advising for the School of Music.

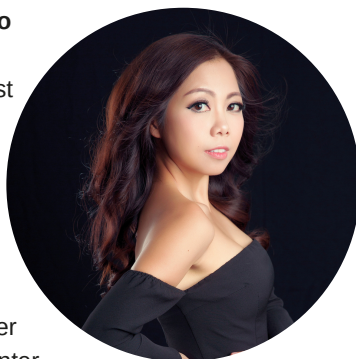


Outside of the University, Dr. Plenk is active as a guest conductor, clinician, and adjudicator. He has worked with concert bands, marching bands, and drum corps from across the United States, Singapore, and Japan, including a three-season tenure with the Tenrikyo Aimachi Marching Band from Nagoya, Japan. Dr. Plenk has presented or conducted at the CBDNA Western/Northwestern and Southern Division Conferences, as well as the CBDNA National Athletic Band Symposium.

Before arriving in Memphis, Dr. Plenk served as Associate Director of Bands and Director of Athletic Bands at the University of Nevada, Reno, developing the athletic band program into one of the most respected in the region. He received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in conducting from the University of California, Los Angeles, where he was Conductor of the UCLA Symphonic Band, Associate Conductor of the UCLA Wind Ensemble, and Associate Conductor of the UCLA Brass Ensemble. He also received a Master of Music degree in tuba performance from UCLA, and a Bachelor of Music degree in tuba performance from Ithaca College.

Bích-Vân Nguyễn Soprano

Singer-actress-songwriter, producer, TV host Bích-Vân Nguyễn is one of the most versatile and sought-after Vietnamese-American artists. She performs in Opera, Musical Theater and stage productions, headlining concerts around the world at prestigious venues such as Kennedy Center, Rainbow Room (Rockefeller Center), Segerstrom Center for the Arts, Musco Center for the Arts, Carpenter Performing Arts Center, Quan Ngua Stadium (Vietnam), South Korea and Australia...



Notable roles: “Muse” (lead) in the Off-Broadway musical “A World Without Harmony”, Mai (lead) in the World-Premiere opera “What The Horse Eats”, Lead in the World-Premiere monodrama “Count To Ten”, Mẹ Mỡ and Sùng Bà in the opera “Tale of Lady Thi Kinh”, Cleopatra in “Giulio Cesare”, Tuptim in “The King and I”, Marian in “The Music Man”, Cathy in “The Last Five Years”... and more. Bích-Vân produces/hosts her TV musical show “Gác Nhỏ THE NOOK Acoustic” while appearing in countless TV/radio interviews/talk shows, including being a guest coach/celebrity judge on SBTN VOICE. She also had the pleasure to premiere Viet- Cuong’s Autumn Triptych last Fall at University of the Pacific, CA.

Besides her 14 albums, Bích-Vân can be seen and heard in numerous productions. Previously trained at National Music Conservatory (Vietnam) and Bob Cole Conservatory of Music (CA), Bích-Vân holds a Master’s Degree in Musical Theater and an Advanced Certificate in Vocal Pedagogy from New York University.

Besides actively performing, she co-owns and teaches at VS Music Studios, coaches and music directs for over 20 years, including 2 years in the Faculty of New York University.

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