

Guest Artist Biography

Arx duo (Garrett Arney/Sijia Huang)



Arx duo is dedicated to the expansion of the percussion chamber music repertoire through the creation and presentation of new works, the educating and inspiring of young artists, and exciting performances inviting audiences to engage with new works and artists from all over the world. They have had premiere performances throughout the globe, conducted workshops on three continents, and worked with a variety of composers and artists to bring new creations to life for communities everywhere.

arx has performed in a number of different venues from a parking lot in West Africa to the Royal Albert Concert Hall in London. Focused on bringing new large scale works to life, the duo is passionate about connecting with audiences all over and engaging through the creation of new art, inspiring audiences to be curious and seek out what might be next in the world of new music. With a repertoire ranging from established masters to today's newest compositional voices, arx duo has worked closely with composers such as Jonathan Bailey Holland, Ted Hearne, Steven Mackey, Juri Seo, and many more. They have worked with a performed with renowned performers and chamber ensembles such as the Dover String Quartet, Aeolus String Quartet, Bergamot String Quartet, Amy Yang, Henry Kramer, The Percussion Collective, Jason Treuting, and many others.

Recent commissions and performances include "Memoir" by Steven Mackey, a 75 minute work for the Dover String Quartet, arx duo, and narrator Natalie Christa, "The Harmonic Canon" by Dominic Murcott, a piece for a giant 1500 pound, double sided, SPINNING bell and more metallic instruments, and multiple new creations for percussion do on the orchestral stage in many coming seasons, working with composers and orchestras to bring these works to life. Most recently the duo just released a full album of "Memoir" by Steven Mackey on Bridge records.

As educators, arx duo has held guest positions at Peabody Conservatory, Michigan State University, and are currently faculty at Curtis Institute of Music Young Artist Summer Program. They've also given masterclasses to young musicians on three continents, including many locations in the states. They have also given residencies (both in person and virtual) for the composition departments of Princeton, Boston Conservatory, and more in the coming seasons.

The name "arx duo" comes from the artists' desire to forge new connections and artistic pathways or "arcs" within the genre, expanding the opportunities for their music to reach new audiences. arx duo proudly endorses Adams Instruments, Pearl Drums, Zildjian Cymbals, Evans Drumheads, and Vic Firth Sticks and Mallets

Program Note

“Danse Bacchanale” from Samson et Dalila, Op. 47 Saint-Saëns (1835 - 1921)

Camille Saint-Saëns’s opera Samson and Delilah is best remembered today not for its biblical drama, but for this electrifying ballet sequence. The “Dance Bacchanale” erupts in Act III, when Delilah and the Philistines celebrate their triumph over Samson with a frenzied display of music and motion. Saint-Saëns combines sinuous Middle Eastern–inflected melodies with driving rhythms and brilliant orchestral color, capturing both the sensuality and the menace of the scene.

What makes the “Bacchanale” so effective in the concert hall is the composer’s gift for pacing. He begins with an exotic oboe solo, slowly adding layers of percussion, winds, and strings until the entire orchestra is swept up in ecstatic, almost dangerous energy. The result is a dazzling showpiece that has outlived the opera itself, a testament to Saint-Saëns’s skill at crafting music that is both evocative and irresistibly entertaining.

Percussion Concerto (2024) Michael Gilbertson (b. 1987)

This concerto was commissioned by the SJCO and the Arx Duo, and was written with the duo’s unique musical synergy in mind. Structured in four movements, each section draws on a distinct character from the featured instruments. The first movement, Stillness, highlights the marimba’s smooth harmonic sonorities. The second, Sticks & Stones, is a fast, rattling scherzo. The rhapsodic third movement unfolds in long, winding melodies. In the final movement, Hocket, motivic fragments are passed rapidly between the soloists and ensemble, inspired by the medieval technique of interwoven rhythms.

Pictures at an Exhibition (arr. M. Ravel) Modest Mussorgsky (1839 - 1881)

When Modest Mussorgsky’s close friend, the artist and architect Viktor Hartmann, died suddenly in 1873, the composer poured his grief into music. After attending an exhibition of Hartmann’s works in St. Petersburg, Mussorgsky created Pictures at an Exhibition for solo piano, imagining himself strolling through the gallery, pausing to reflect on each piece of art. Nearly fifty years later, Maurice Ravel’s brilliant orchestration transformed the piano score into one of the most dazzling orchestral showpieces in the repertoire. The recurring “Promenade” theme represents Mussorgsky himself moving from painting to painting. It first appears in bold, unhurried steps, but each return changes in color and character, reflecting the composer’s shifting emotions as he journeys through the gallery. The first picture, Gnomus, is a grotesque sketch of a gnome with misshapen legs, brought to life with jagged rhythms and sudden outbursts. From this caricature, we move to the wistful Old Castle, where the mournful sound of a saxophone suggests a medieval troubadour singing before ancient walls. A brief promenade leads to Tuileries, a lighthearted depiction of children at play in a Parisian garden, their quarrels captured in quick, fluttering phrases.

The mood shifts with Bydlo, as the grinding weight of an ox cart is heard in the low brass and strings, trundling forward with relentless force. Contrast comes with the whimsical Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, inspired by Hartmann’s costume design for a ballet of dancing children dressed as chicks, full of chirping woodwinds and playful rhythms. Samuel Goldenberg and Shmyle follows, portraying two contrasting figures—the pompous, wealthy man in stern unison strings and the pitiful, whining voice of the poor man in a muted trumpet.

The gallery grows darker with Catacombs, where heavy brass chords evoke Hartmann exploring Paris’s underground burial chambers. In the section titled Cum mortuis in lingua mortua (“with the dead in a dead language”), the Promenade theme returns as a ghostly chant, as though Mussorgsky is communing with his departed friend.

The final two movements provide a breathtaking conclusion. The Hut on Fowl’s Legs unleashes the terrifying witch Baba Yaga, whose magical hut runs about on chicken legs; the music races with ferocious energy. Without pause, Mussorgsky leads us to The Great Gate of Kiev, a majestic vision of a monumental gate Hartmann designed but that was never built. Here, pealing bells, noble brass, and triumphant chords bring the suite to a resplendent close, offering not just a tribute to Hartmann but a timeless monument in sound.