

# Liminal: A String Duo Concert

March 21, 2026

featuring Emma Meinrenken (violin) & Joseph Staten (cello)

The Texture of Air Whitney Sheng

De Ave Pheonice Peter Swanson

Print Gallery Roger Zare

PRISM: Blue-Violet Andrew Howes

JĀNAMĀZ Stephen Cabell

canvas-moon Christine Elise Chen

Solitary Relationship Hyeon Joon Sohn

Cantique John Brockett

light / shadow / half-light Apsara Kasiraman

This concert is presented by *Common Resonance*, an NYC-based concert series pairing visual art and music of living composers, founded by Whitney Sheng and Apsara Kasiraman.

## ABOUT THE WORKS

*Program notes may be edited for clarity and length.*

*The Texture of Air* draws from the architectural light in Szelit Cheung’s paintings—works that dwell in charged stillness between seeing and reckoning, meaning held just out of reach. Rather than depicting light directly, the music turns toward what reveals it: the medium through which light becomes visible. Dust and particles render light’s path luminous. By omitting the word “light” from the title, the piece invites the listener to the illumination itself—not in the source, but in the atmosphere it touches. The piece begins in suspension—air sound, fragile harmonics, whispering textures outlining a darkness alive with potential. As motion gathers slowly, the violin and cello trace resonant nodes and flute-like whistles until fractured brightness breaks through. When the music falls quiet, it carries the imprint of what preceded it. Scattered pizzicati flicker like dust catching a last glint. Lines climb higher, fainter, until the resonance thins into something barely held—an image of brightness dispersing, leaving only the air through which it once traveled. - *Whitney Sheng*

*De Ave Pheonice* was written in late 2024, taking some inspiration from an ancient poem about the mythical phoenix, which is reborn from its own ashes. The work features a descending melody of great pathos that is reborn into a new form throughout the work, and requires both the violin and cello to be retuned. - *Peter Swanson*

When I was young, I was obsessed with tessellations after first learning about M.C. Escher’s mind-bending artwork. Today, I find a strong inclination towards writing music about both symmetry and surrealism. *Print Gallery* is characterized by extremely slow glissandi that warp pitches from one harmony to another. Escher’s 1956 “Print Gallery” lithograph’s warped lines and shifting perspectives show a person in a gallery viewing a picture of a city, and in that city is a building that has an art gallery in which a person is looking at a painting of the city. Escher depicts this fluidly and not like a mirror-in-mirror effect, so the impact on the viewer is extremely disorienting while also mesmerizing. - *Roger Zare*

I am very interested in light. In 2025, I developed a harmonic system for large ensemble works to evoke the cosmic colours and light of our upper atmosphere. This is the second chamber work in which I have filtered this system through the musical equivalent of a prism. *PRISM: Blue - Violet* imagines the fragility of those colours under the turning of a prism, as they dance and relate to one another, always on the edge of invisibility. - *Andrew Howes*

*JĀNAMĀZ* is inspired by the Persian prayer mat, an object I have long associated with focus, ritual, and a carefully designed space for attention. What drew me first was its visual language: repeating geometry, borders, symmetry, and the way pattern can feel architectural, like a small room made of lines. The violin and cello function as two strands of the same fabric. Their lines trace and retrace one another in close counterpoint, creating filigrees of sound that behave like light across a textured surface; sometimes crisp and outlined, sometimes blurred into shadow. Resonances linger, overlap, and fade, so the space between gestures becomes as active as the gestures themselves. Rather than narrate a specific act, I wanted to offer a listening environment that is still, spacious, and attentive, where sound can interact with the room in the way a visual form interacts with light, by revealing edges, depth, and quiet detail over time.

- Stephen Cabell

*canvas-moon* was written in response to the oeuvre of visual artist Szelit Cheung, and his visual meditations on light and shadow. Szelit Cheung's work is emotionally profound, and both luminous and dark, a quality that I sought to emulate in *canvas-moon*. In thinking about these themes, I immediately was drawn to the idea of the moon. Humanity's relationship to the moon is very much shaped by our early experience of night: in the time before electricity, the moon's light obscures as much as it clarifies; it looms above an uncertain and mysterious scene, as uncaring as an all-seeing eye; and therefore carries an enormous symbolic magnitude. Such is the quality of Cheung's work. *canvas-moon*, while being far from a direct translation of Cheung's style, is nevertheless a direct outgrowth from it, in that it is the emotional resonance of my experience of his unique artistic voice; my own meditation on all that is both luminous and dark.

- Christine Elise Chen

Szelit Cheung stated, "Void is a transitional state... the moment before reckoning." If light was the ancient answer to the void, its byproduct was the shadow. *Solitary Relationship* inhabits the delicate space between the two. Through the strange friction of shifting scales and minimalistic textures, the piece meditates on the darkness that exists even within perfection. It moves beyond merely describing the void to experiencing it; articulating the deep, unpredicted solitude that shadows human nature.

- Hyeon Joon Sohn

The title *Cantique* recalls the third movement of Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for String Quartet*. I imagined sound as a kind of light—sometimes unified, sometimes fractured. An echo, in this sense, a shadow: the same material returned at an angle, softened or darkened by distance. The piece moves between conditions; a single luminous body at times splits into image and afterimage.

- John Brockett

Inspired by the artwork of Szelit Cheung, *light / shadow / half-light* explores the relationship between light, shadow, and the viewer. Light slowly pours through the space, like a pinprick with liminal presence. Then, the light begins to take shape, and the viewer nears closer. Intensity heightens, proximity brings brightness. But this proximity is intense, and the viewer backs off, as if the light has extinguished. Finally, the light bursts into its full form; open and resonant, the viewer overtaken by its majesty.

- Apsara Kasiraman