



Friends of The Sibelius Academy

Contact: Jennifer Wada Communications

718-855-7101

jennifer@wadacommunications.com

www.wadacommunications.com

VERSOI ENSEMBLE – a New International Group – Debuts at New York’s Merkin Hall on Tuesday, November 13, 2018

Brought together by a Juilliard School/Sibelius Academy collaboration in 2017, young musicians form a new force for music and cultural diplomacy



In the summer of 2017, two of the top performing arts schools in the world partnered to create a high-profile hands-across-the-water collaboration: a joint-orchestra comprised of musicians representing both The Juilliard School of New York and the Sibelius Academy of Helsinki. Led by superstar conductor (and Sibelius Academy alumnus) Esa-Pekka Salonen, the orchestra gave performances in world-renowned concert venues in Helsinki, Stockholm, and New York. *The New York Times*, in its review of the final concert, described the ensemble as “excellent ... as only to be expected from such lofty auspices.”

That “lofty” collaboration has seeded a very grounded new enterprise. Inspired by the performances and friendship that resulted from the seeming once-in-a-lifetime experience, four of the orchestra’s alumni from Juilliard and two from the Sibelius Academy have founded the **Versoi Ensemble**, a group that will make its debut with a concert at New York’s Merkin Hall

on Tuesday, November 13, 2018, and the Beatrice Friedman Symphony Center Holley Hall in Sarasota, Florida, on November 18.

“Versoi” in Finnish means “to sprout.” And the ensemble’s motto is “Cultural diplomacy through chamber music.”

“Many of us had been considering, independently, how we could re-ignite the spirit of the tour,” said Mosa Tsay, a Juilliard cellist who is the executive director of Versoi Ensemble. “That spirit resulted from an exciting combination of new music, collaboration, and cultural exchange, and Versoi Ensemble aims to continue that through chamber music.” “Cultural diplomacy was always an interest, but it has become a central part of what we want to do going forward,” said violinist Max Tan, the group’s artistic director. “The orchestra tour was, essentially, an inspiring example of Juilliard’s ‘artist as citizen’ philosophy. What we hope to do through chamber music in Versoi is to build communities of colleagues and listeners who share this passion. We certainly hope it leads to more chamber music projects with friends in the future.”

For its inaugural project, the Versoi Ensemble features a core membership of **Max Tan, violin** (MM, Artist Diploma candidate, Juilliard School); **Johannes Hakulinen, violin** (graduate student, Sibelius Academy); **Bethany Hargreaves, viola** (MM, Juilliard School); **Max Nyman, viola** (MM candidate, Sibelius Academy); and **Matthew Chen, cello** (MM candidate, Juilliard School). This quintet will perform a chamber music program of Esa-Pekka Salonen’s *Homunculus* for string quartet and Dvořák’s String Quintet in E-flat Major in both New York and Sarasota. At the Merkin Hall concert, 22 string musicians from the orchestra tour will reunite to join the quintet in performances of Sibelius’s Romance in C Major for Strings, and Elgar’s Introduction and Allegro for String Quartet and String Orchestra.

The programming for the Versoi Ensemble reflected various considerations, including its commitment to high quality music-making as well as repertoire that reflected the wishes of all its members. “Our conversations about programming started out as a potluck,” said Mosa, “with everyone bringing something to the table. The experience of working with Maestro Salonen as conductor and composer was eye-opening, and so to program *Homunculus* was a unanimous decision. We wanted the program to be rooted in the same collaborative spirit as the rehearsal process.”

The Versoi Ensemble will follow its debut concert with a performance in Sarasota, Florida, on November 18, 2018, in partnership with [Music for Food](#), a musician-led initiative to fight hunger in local communities. “In the spirit of Versoi Ensemble’s cultural diplomacy vision, the advocacy for fundamental human rights or needs that transcend beyond international borders is of paramount importance,” said Max. In this collaboration, the ensemble partners with All Faiths Food Bank in Sarasota to raise awareness and combat local hunger. Music For Food, founded by Grammy award winning violist Kim Kashkashian in 2010, “believes both music and food are essential to human life and growth.” The concerts organized through its platform bring “music to the ears, food to the table.”

Meeting in 2017, an ensemble in 2018

“We live in times of growing isolationism,” Esa-Pekka Salonen commented in an interview during the orchestra tour. “And for a small country like Finland, active international cooperation in all fields is of utmost importance.” The collaboration between two major international music institutions was featured heavily with live video and radio broadcasts by YLE (the Finnish Broadcasting Company) and Sveriges Radio (Radio Sweden). Kaarlo Hildén, Dean of the Sibelius Academy, said of the collaboration, “We will be creating a new generation of cultural ambassadors by giving these young talented musicians an opportunity like this – not only will this cooperation provide creative inspiration to our young participants, it also gives them a chance to build a network with their peers overseas.”

This was a catalyst for the discussions between Mosa, Johannes, and the two Maxes after months of keeping in touch. As current full-time graduate students with quickly developing careers, the four founders sought funding to support musicians working as cultural ambassadors. On March 21, 2018, they were awarded a grant from the Finlandia Foundation National, an organization that promotes Finnish culture in the U.S. and encourages cultural exchange, one of whose early patrons was Jean Sibelius. Their planning efforts were guided by the Friends of The Sibelius Academy in New York, and the project is advised by Leland Hoch, Treasurer and a founder of the Friends, who has been working on behalf of the Sibelius Academy in the U.S. since 1976, and the organization’s Interim Executive Director, Dr. Erika Sauer. Together, the two advisors offer over forty years of concert presentation experience and have helped the young team of musicians realize the potential and importance of ambassadorship and diplomacy.

Chamber music is the focus of the Versoi Ensemble. According to Max, “the medium is perfect for building bridges between people and cultures because it is such an intimate form of collaboration. In response to the rising tide of isolationism, we believe that we can build communities of artists and listeners through this engagement, and every friendship we build is a bridge to a more peaceful world in the future.” While the Versoi Ensemble is starting out as an exponent of Finnish-American collaboration, its founders foresee a future in which membership expands beyond the roster of the joint-orchestra tour. “We look forward to this movement continuing even further,” said Mosa, “with our counterpart organizers developing projects in other countries or other musicians finding unique project ideas that we can enable and support under this vision.”

www.versoienensemble.org

The November 13 international debut of the Versoi Ensemble is presented by Friends of The Sibelius Academy, the American support foundation of the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki. The New York and Sarasota concerts are made possible by a major grant from the Ehrnrooth Foundation, Helsinki.

Matthew Chen, cello, graduated from The Juilliard School in the spring of 2018 under the instruction of Natasha Brofsky and has recently returned to pursue a Master of Music degree. Born and raised in Westlake Village, CA, he began his cello studies at age six with Ben Hong, the associate principal cellist of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, for nine years. He currently serves as principal and assistant principal cellist of the Juilliard Orchestra and Juilliard Lab Orchestra, the Aspen Festival Orchestra, and the National Taiwanese Symphony Orchestra. A passionate chamber musician, Mr. Chen has performed annually in Juilliard's Chamberfest since 2015, most recently collaborating with violist Hsin-Yun Huang. In May 2018, Mr. Chen and his clarinet trio commissioned and a new work by composer Tengku Irfan in New York City. He has performed in masterclasses for esteemed artists such as Lluís Claret, Frans Helmerson, and Joseph Kalichstein, and performed in venues such as Alice Tully Hall, David Geffen Hall, Chiesa San Domenico in Italy, and Muiden Castle in the Netherlands.

Johannes Hakulinen, violin, is currently completing his graduate studies at Sibelius Academy with Petri Aarnio. Mr. Hakulinen has performed as a soloist with numerous symphony orchestras including the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, Lahti Youth Symphony and Arturo Soria Symphony Orchestra (Madrid). He served as the concertmaster of Finnish National Youth Orchestra Vivo for four years and has performed solo recitals in Tampere, Lahti and Helsinki. He is a founder of Kitee Chamber Concerts Festival and a permanent performer in Sibelius Finland Experience concerts. Mr. Hakulinen has played in the most eminent orchestras in Finland such as Avanti! Chamber Orchestra and Finnish National Opera Orchestra. Since 2016, he has been a long-term substitute in the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Hakulinen began his studies at Lahti Conservatory under the guidance of Pertti Sutinen in 1999, and among his former teachers are Juhani Palola, Ulla-Maija Hallantie, and Pekka Kauppinen.

Bethany Hargreaves, viola, a native of Cleveland, OH, has performed as a solo, chamber, and orchestral musician across North America, Europe, China, and Israel. Notable performances include her debut at the Millennium Stage in Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, concerto appearances at Cleveland Institute of Music, and orchestral performances in Berlin Philharmonie and KKL Luzerne. A passionate chamber musician as a result of the love and dedication modeled by the Cavani String Quartet, Ms. Hargreaves has collaborated in concert with distinguished musicians including Itzhak Perlman, Peter Salaff, Donald Weilerstein, Michael Kannen, and members of The Cleveland Orchestra. Ms. Hargreaves received a Young Artist Certificate and a Bachelor's Degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where she studied with Jeffrey Irvine and Lynne Ramsey. She recently graduated from The Juilliard School with her Master's degree under the tutelage of Heidi Castleman and Misha Amory, and was a proud recipient of the Kovner Fellowship. Ms. Hargreaves is currently pursuing a Master's of Musical Arts degree at the Yale School of Music, where she is studying with Ettore Causa.

Max Nyman, viola, is currently finishing his Master's degree at Sibelius Academy under the tuition of Atte Kilpeläinen, having previously studied with Helge Valtonen and William Coleman at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg. Until his fateful switch to viola in 2013, Mr. Nyman studied violin at the West Helsinki Music School. He toured Europe as concertmaster of the West Helsinki Chamber Orchestra and in Scandinavia as principal violist of Orkester Norden, and, in 2016, participated in an apprenticeship with the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. He has performed in the viola sections of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony, Finnish National Opera and Avanti! Chamber Orchestra. Mr. Nyman's interest in early music has taken him to courses in historically informed performance practice with Reinhard Goebel and Minna Kangas. He has performed with the Finnish Baroque Orchestra and as soloist in Telemann's double viola concerto.

Max Tan, violin, has been praised as “eloquent” by the New York Times and a “warmly rhapsodic player” by the Boston Globe. The Taiwanese-American violinist has performed as soloist with the Juilliard Orchestra, Lowell Philharmonic, Longwood Symphony, Boston Philharmonic Youth, and Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestras, appearing on prominent stages in the United States and Europe. His recent engagements in 2018 include his Kennedy Center debut, being awarded joint 1st-prize at the 46th Hudson Valley Philharmonic International String Competition, as well as recital and chamber music appearances in Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Quirico and Spoleto, Italy. In the 2018-19 season, Mr. Tan will be perform on the WQXR Midday Masterworks recital series and solo with the Kendall Square Orchestra and the New Juilliard Ensemble. Mr. Tan holds undergraduate degrees in human developmental and regenerative biology and music at Harvard College and a master’s degree from The Juilliard School. A Kovner Fellowship alumnus, Mr. Tan currently studies with Donald Weilerstein and Catherine Cho as an Artist Diploma candidate at Juilliard, where he also serves as faculty assistant to both. Mr. Tan is also a member of the Sarasota Orchestra.

Mosa Tsay, cello, will complete her graduate studies at The Juilliard School in December 2018 as a student of Joel Krosnick. Recent notable performances include the Mendelssohn octet with the Danish String Quartet, the premiere of “Echo Drift” at PROTOTYPE Festival with International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE). In 2017, Ms. Tsay became a frequent collaborator with ICE for recordings and performances at National Sawdust and NOKIA Bell Labs. She performs with AXIOM and New Juilliard Ensemble at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center, but is most recognized in New York and San Francisco Bay Area as an organizer of concerts in nontraditional music venues. She has curated and reconstructed the concert experience for over eighty house concerts. In partnership with Groupmuse, she presented two sold-out concerts featuring eight cellos in a chocolate warehouse in Brooklyn and a coworking space in San Francisco. (“The most prolific groupmuser in our history. And she’s now, officially, a coast-to-coast Massivemuse impresario.” - Groupmuse) In 2016, Ms. Tsay launched the debut concert of a contemporary cello collective in San Francisco Bay Area at the studio of American sculptor Bruce Beasley. Upcoming projects include a collaboration with sound artist Nao Gunji and denim artist Takayuki Echigoya to perform a piece for cello and vintage Singer sewing machines. Ms. Tsay plays a 1900 Collin-Mezin cello, on loan from a private collection.

Tuesday, November 13, 2018, at 7:30 pm
Kaufman Center - Merkin Hall, 129 West 67th Street, New York City

Friends of The Sibelius Academy Presents

VERSOI ENSEMBLE – International Debut

Chamber Players:

Johannes Hakulinen, violin
Max Tan, violin
Bethany Hargreaves, viola
Max Nyman, viola
Matthew Chen, cello

Violins

Johannes Hakulinen
Max Tan
Carter Coleman
Jordan Hendy
I-Jung Huang
Byungchan Lee
George Meyer
Ashley Park
Yeri Roh
Sophia Stoyanovich
Agnes Tse

Violas

Bethany Hargreaves
Max Nyman
Charles Galante
Emily Liu
Grace Takeda
Meagan Turner

Cellos

Matthew Chen
Connor Kim
Megan Yip

Double Bass

Alexander Bickard
Andrew Sommer

SIBELIUS	Romance in C Major for String Orchestra, Op.42
DVOŘÁK	String Quintet in E-flat Major, Op.97
SALONEN	<i>Homunculus</i> for String Quartet (2007)
ELGAR	Introduction and Allegro for String Quartet and String Orchestra

Tickets: \$30, \$10 for students/seniors

<https://www.kaufmanmusiccenter.org/mch/event/versoi-ensemble-debut-concert/>

This concert is made possible by a major grant from the Ehrnrooth Foundation, Helsinki, Finland.

September 26, 2018