



2022-23 Season

Ensemble 20/21 Presents "Music of the Earth"

Curtis's acclaimed group highlights compositions inspired by the natural world in the second concert of the 2022-23 season

PHILADELPHIA, PA—January 31, 2023—**Ensemble 20/21** presents "**Music of the Earth**," the second of three programs in the contemporary music ensemble's bold and eclectic 2022–23 season, on **Saturday, February 11, 2023, at 8:00 p.m.**, in **Gould Rehearsal Hall** at the **Curtis Institute of Music**. This nature-inspired concert, with selections from **Jerod Tate**, **Kaija Saariaho**, **Gabriela Lena Frank**, and **Olivier Messiaen**, evokes the sights, sounds, and wonder of the Earth and features the world premiere of **Tania León**'s moving song cycle, *In the Field*. Featuring the talents of Curtis's extraordinarily gifted students, the program combines works by one of the most influential composers of the twentieth century and four prolific living composers who are redefining classical music and challenging its traditional boundaries through their innovative works and perspectives.

"Music of the Earth" centers on compositions inspired by the natural world," says **Nick DiBerardino** (Composition '18), Ensemble 20/21 director, acclaimed composer, chair of composition studies, and senior associate dean of performance studies at Curtis. "Tate, Saariaho, Frank, León, and Messiaen all have something distinctive to say about our environment. For me, the program as a whole is an alluring invitation to reflect on the ways we engage with the world—and also an encouragement to protect and appreciate it more meaningfully than before. This musical celebration is a platform from which Curtis can start contemplating its next all-school project, in which our entire community will investigate music and scholarship connected to our planet."

The concert begins with critically acclaimed Chickasaw composer and pianist **Jerod Impichchaachaaha'** **Tate's** *Talowa' Hiloba (Thunder Song)*. This fascinating work for solo timpani explores the intersection of classical and Indigenous musical cultures through his compositions., and the title of this astounding piece for solo timpani comes from the Chickasaw word for thunder and lighting. Throughout history, the Chickasaw people believed thunderstorms were the holy people at war above the clouds. Defying death and displaying courage, these warriors would shoot their guns into the sky during the storms. *Talowa' Hiloba* (Thunder Song) is an homage to this tradition.

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Inspired by *Oiseaux*, a collection of poems by Saint-John Perse, award-winning Finnish composer **Kaija Saariaho**'s beguiling chamber work *Terrestre* uses the rich metaphor of birds to describe life's mysteries. Unlike Messiaen's *Oiseaux Exotiques*, another avian-influenced composition featured later in the program, Saariaho appears to be intrigued by the idea of birds rather than referencing the sounds they make. *Terrestre* is divided into two parts. The first frenetic movement, "Oiseau dansant" ("Dancing Bird"), is a celebration of life and dance, and the second, "L'Oiseau, un satellite infima," likens the bird to a satellite in celestial orbit, exploring intriguing soundscapes throughout.

The program continues with a riveting performance of *Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout* by **Gabriela Lena Frank**, Latin Grammy winner, pianist, and recent composer-in-residence with The Philadelphia Orchestra. This complex and imaginative six-movement suite, performed by a string quartet, is a fascinating collection of miniature tone poems. Inspired by the "idea of *mestizaje* as envisioned by Peruvian writer José María Arguedas, where cultures can coexist without the subjugation of one by the other," Frank's captivating work explores aspects of ancient Peruvian civilization with modern musical influences.

Following intermission, Ensemble 20/21 presents the world premiere of Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, conductor, pianist, and educator **Tania León**'s *In the Field*, returning to Curtis this season following her role as 2021–22 composer-in-residence. Commissioned by the McCollin Fund and the Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia in celebration of the organization's landmark bicentennial, this highly anticipated song cycle for voice and piano quintet features Spanish and English text by Cuban American writer, playwright, and award-winning poet Carlos Pintado, recipient of the prestigious Paz Poetry Prize. Ensemble 20/21 and captivating Curtis student, soprano **Sarah Fleiss**, breathe life into León's exquisite score and Pintado's nuanced poetry, a meditation on the beauty, mythology, and historical complexity of Philadelphia's iconic landmarks and its symbols of patriotism and justice.

"The inspiration for creating the song cycle *In the Field* came from the beauty and insights of Carlos Pintado's poetry as he recently strolled through the city of Philadelphia," says **Tania León**. "His poems allowed me to imagine the places vividly and feel their emotional power. Pintado connected to the invisible history of the icons we all cherish, and he saw the city with the eyes of his native language—a language we both share. The rhythm of his words touched me profoundly. In his last poem, written in English, he transmutes the love he feels for the city to an imaginary lover that is treated with the utmost respect, evoking the love we all feel for the multiple and diverse communities coming together to create a nation."

A passion for birds and music collides in the final selection of the evening with French composer, organist, and ornithologist **Olivier Messiaen**'s dazzling 1956 piece for piano and small orchestra, *Oiseaux exotiques*. Based on the recorded songs of 47 exotic species of birds throughout China, India, Malaysia, and North and South America, this chirping, squawking celebration of life is full of colorful noises, both strident and shrieking, cheerful and richly sonorous. The virtuosic musicians of Ensemble 20/21 invite the audience to witness a feathered frenzy inside an imaginary aviary as they play this delightfully jittery, cacophonous score, with percussive Indian and Greek rhythmic patterns scattered throughout.

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Flexible in size and scope, **Ensemble 20/21** performs a wide range of music from the 20th and 21st centuries, including works by Curtis students and alumni. The ensemble has appeared at major U.S. venues such as the Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, and the Miller Theatre, as well as international venues. The ensemble has also presented concert portraits of iconic composers in residence Tania León, Alvin Singleton, Unsuk Chin, John Corigliano, George Crumb, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Chen Yi, among many others.

Ensemble 20/21 closes the 2022–23 season on Saturday, March 25, 2023, at 8 p.m. in Curtis’s Gould Rehearsal Hall, with a “Portrait of Aaron Jay Kernis,” featuring *Earth* and *Goblin Market* by the Pulitzer Prize and GRAMMY Award-winning composer.

Visit [Curtis.edu/Calendar](https://www.curtis.edu/Calendar) to view Curtis’s entire season of performances and events.

Ticketing Information

Subscriptions are available for Curtis’s 2022–23 season. The flexible Choose Your Own subscription option offers 25% off ticket prices when purchasing tickets to two or more performances. For the 2022–23 season, Curtis is also offering a new Season Pass, with access to all remaining performances in the 2022–23 season for \$99. To order a subscription, visit [Curtis.edu/Subscribe](https://www.curtis.edu/Subscribe), call (215) 893-7902, or email tickets@curtis.edu.

Single tickets for Ensemble 20/21 performances and the 2022–23 season start at \$19:

[Curtis.edu/Ensemble2021](https://www.curtis.edu/Ensemble2021)

About the Curtis Institute of Music

The **Curtis Institute of Music** educates and trains exceptionally gifted young musicians to engage a local and global community through the highest level of artistry. For nearly a century Curtis has provided each member of its small student body with an unparalleled education alongside musical peers, distinguished by a “learn by doing” philosophy and personalized attention from a faculty that includes a high proportion of actively performing musicians. With admissions based solely on artistic promise, no student is turned away due to financial need. Curtis invests in each admitted student, ensuring no tuition is charged for their studies and they enter the profession free from educational debt. In a typical year, Curtis students hone their craft through more than 200 orchestra, opera, and solo and chamber music offerings in Philadelphia and around the world. Learn more at [Curtis.edu](https://www.curtis.edu).

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ENSEMBLE 20/21
Music of the Earth

Saturday, February 11, 2023, at 8 p.m.

Gould Rehearsal Hall, Curtis Institute of Music, 1616 Locust Street, Philadelphia

Micah Gleason, Rita E. Hauser Conducting Fellow

PROGRAM

JEROD TATE	<i>Talowa' Hiloha (Thunder Song)</i>
KAIJA SAARIAHO	<i>Terrestre</i>
GABRIELA LENA FRANK	<i>Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout</i>
TANIA LEÓN	<i>In the Field</i>
OLIVIER MESSIAEN	<i>Oiseaux Exotiques</i>

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[Curtis.edu/Ensemble2021](https://www.curtis.edu/Ensemble2021). Season subscriptions are also available.

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