

*Composer Portraits*

# Unsub Chin

Ensemble Signal

Rachel Calloway, *mezzo-soprano*

Oliver Hagen, *piano*

Bill Solomon, *percussion*

Ning Yu, *piano*

Brad Lubman, *conductor*

— ◆ ◆ ◆ —  
Thursday, March 13, 8:00 p.m.  
— ◆ ◆ ◆ —



*Please note that photography and the use of recording devices are not permitted. Remember to turn off all cellular phones and pagers before tonight's performance begins. Miller Theatre is wheelchair accessible. Large print programs are available upon request. For more information or to arrange accommodations, please call 212-854-7799.*

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*Gradus ad infinitum* (1989) **U.S. premiere**

Unsuk Chin (b. 1961)

Etudes No. 5 & 6 from *Six Piano Etudes* (1999)

Ning Yu, *piano*

*snagS&Snarls* (2003-04) **New York premiere**

Rachel Calloway, *mezzo-soprano*

INTERMISSION

On-stage discussion with Unsuk Chin and Brad Lubman.

*Doppelkonzert*, Double Concerto for piano, percussion, and ensemble (2002)

**New York premiere**, Oliver Hagen, *piano*, and Bill Solomon, *percussion*



This program runs approximately ninety minutes, including intermission.

Major support for Composer Portraits is provided by  
the National Endowment for the Arts and  
the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts.

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# About the Program

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## Introduction

In what, for want of a better term, we still regularly refer to as “western” music, the work of composers from further afield is becoming increasingly prominent. Often their music is tinged unmistakably with otherness, with melodic shapes, colors, harmonies, and instrumental usages that come from the emphatically non-western traditions they encountered in growing up, so that a piece by a Chinese or Japanese composer is instantly recognizable as such.

That is not so with Unsuk Chin. Any local color, in the work of one born in Seoul in 1961, is much harder to find – nor, one might add, does Chin’s music proclaim a specifically female sensibility. We seem to be, rather, in a world between worlds: between Asian and Euro-American, between female and male, between present and past – a world in which opposites can flip over, and in which supreme technique can draw an essence from almost any source. This is not music as autobiography or self-expression. Indeed, we may learn rather little about Chin as a person through listening to a day of her compositions. We will, however, learn a lot about music, and about the projection of feeling, fantasy, and wit through gorgeous, reeling, iridescent sound.

Chin studied composition at the National University in her home city with Sukhi Kang, the most distinguished Korean composer of the preceding generation. In 1984 she had a piece played at the ISCM World Music Days, and the following year a grant from the German state took her to Hamburg to study with Ligeti for three years. The experience was crucial. Ligeti was impressed not so much by what she had achieved as by her potential, which she proved in learning to live up to his standards of technical virtuosity, wide awareness of the world’s musical traditions, curiosity, and independence. For a while, finished compositions were not the object; just one, a 1986 setting of extracts from the *Trojan Women* of Euripides for soloists, choir, and orchestra, survives from this period. It was performed in 1990 in Oslo, again under ISCM auspices.

Remaining in Germany after her time with Ligeti, Chin settled in Berlin, and returned to active composition early in 1991, with the beginnings of her *Akrostichon-Wortspiel*

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for soprano and ensemble, a work she finished in 1993. This was her breakthrough.

*Akrostichon-Wortspiel* was first performed complete in London under George Benjamin's direction, and was rapidly taken up by the leading new-music ensembles of Europe, among which the Ensemble InterContemporain commissioned *Fantaisie mécanique* for five players on brass, percussion, and piano (1994) and *Xi* for ensemble and electronic sound (1998). During this period of growing renown, Chin also wrote *ParaMetaString* for the Kronos Quartet, began a continuing sequence of piano études, and produced three contrasting large-scale works in quick succession: her Piano Concerto (1996-7), *Miroirs des temps* (1999), and *Kāla* (2000).

The second of these was introduced in London by Kent Nagano, who became a persuasive advocate of her work, and who was responsible for three major commissions over the next few years: her Violin Concerto, her opera *Alice in Wonderland*, and her symphonic piece *Rocaná*. First performed in January 2002, the concerto brought another lift to her reputation and has been played around the world by its original soloist, Viviane Hagner, besides being taken up by other leading performers. It was followed by a third score for the Ensemble InterContemporain (the Double Concerto with solo piano and percussion) and then by a period when Chin concentrated on *Alice* – though she took time to write two sets of nonsense songs: *snagS&Snarls* and *Cantatrix Sopranica*.

Since the première of *Alice*, in 2007 at the Bavarian State Opera, her works have included concertos for cello and sheng as well as pieces for the Ensemble Modern (*Gougalōn*, 2009) and the Los Angeles Philharmonic (*Graffiti*, 2012-13).

### *Gradus ad infinitum* (1989)

This is one of seven pieces Chin produced during a year (1988-9) she spent working at the electronic music studio of the Technical University in Berlin. She went back there in the mid-1990s to create a couple more pieces, and since then has been an occasional visitor to IRCAM, always using electronic resources to expand instrumental virtuosity.

So it is here. The piece is entirely made from piano sounds, retuned electronically to a scale of twenty intervals to the octave. At the start, the “steps to infinity,” to quote the title, seem to be going on upwards or downwards forever, like the stairways in a drawing by M.C. Escher. But then the notes begin to discover other antics they can play, in what develops as a fitting homage to Conlon Nancarrow, lasting a little over eleven minutes.

## **Piano Etudes (2000-03)**

The piano is Chin's own instrument, and she has written more solo music for it than for any other. Piano music, which is all about wresting subtlety and shape from machinery, suits the nature of Chin's art, as does the *étude* form, which is of course all about exactitude and virtuosity. Of the six she has produced so far, she wrote the last in 2000, for Pierre Boulez's seventy-fifth birthday, and the fifth in 2003.

Anyone writing piano *études* in the last three decades has had to face the challenge of Ligeti's, and it says much for Chin's creative sureness and bravery that she accepted such a challenge, especially when it derived from her teacher, at a time when he was still adding to his own store. One might recognize Ligetian features here: the setting up of fractal-style rules having to do with repetition and growth, rules leading to a complexity that overwhelms them, and the invention of ideas that are almost animated in their will to live and prosper. Yet the pieces are decidedly Chinesque, too, in their rainbow modal colors, their multiple allusions (not only to Ligeti but also to twentieth-century French music and jazz, sometimes in the same bar) and their flash.

### *No. 5 "Toccata"*

An elementary simplicity opens No. 5 of the set – a little flurry of semiquavers across intervals of a fifth and a minor third – to give rise to a rampage of self-similarity in which the original idea is everywhere and nowhere. The semiquavers soon become persistent, as befits a toccata, but the rhythmic and harmonic accents wobble all over the place.

### *No. 6 "Grains"*

One note in the high treble, in No. 6, then a second even higher, and the stage is set for a fantasy of extreme registers – except that a G sharp in the middle of the piano keeps making its presence felt. What can be done? Many efforts are attempted, but nothing works to silence this insistently repeating note that sounds through, even when the music goes in for a cannonade of two-part counterpoint. And the thing is there at the end.

## **snagS&Snarls for soprano and orchestra (2003-4)**

Chin was introduced to Lewis Carroll's two *Alice* books by Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. Having decided to write an *Alice* opera, she began with a set of five brief Alice songs, grouped under a title taken from the first section of another Hofstadter



book, *Metamagical Themas*. The work was introduced at Ojai in 2004, with Kent Nagano conducting and Margaret Thompson as soloist.

### *I. Alice – Acrostic*

Four of the songs found their way into the opera, but not the first, whose text comes, in a paradoxical move typical of the composer, from the very end of the second *Alice* book, *Through the Looking Glass*, where Carroll appends to his story an acrostic on the name of his model for the title character: Alice Pleasance Liddell. Over a middle A (presumably for “Alice”), a pair of oboes wafts in, creating a harmonic world consonant but unsettled, adrift in a delicate treble world where the only instruments in play are high woodwinds, solo violins and violas, harp, mandolin, and celesta. The singer joins this world with melody that is entirely diatonic and mostly in conjoint intervals, but homeless, as if dreaming of a D major that was long ago. When the acrostic has been completed, there comes a foretaste of the next song, followed by a return as the soprano ponders conundra.

### *II. Who in the world am I?*

Enigmas of time and identity are then the subject of the second song, whose words are Alice’s early in the first book, after she has shrunk and grown. The music shares her doubts in its jumpiness, now with the whole orchestra engaged. A quick upward crescendo is always the same and always different, at once one thing and many. Alice’s mixed-up multiplication table lifts the music to a new level of confusion, within which she sings a nonsense song, and the perpetual motion continues as she returns to her existential questions, to end on the dilemma of a tritone.

### *III. The Tale-Tail of the Mouse*

A little further into *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* we meet the mouse with a long tail and a long tale. The third song sets the latter, with imagery of the former – as in the book, where the tale is a calligram, wriggling down the page. Instrumental gestures tail off in trills or tremolos; meanwhile, the tale is delivered in sprechgesang.

### *IV. Speak roughly to your little boy*

Next comes the Duchess’s grotesque lullaby, which she sings to the baby she rocks in her arms and violently shakes. In complete contrast with the first song, the orchestra is all low and relentless, until the middle section where the Duchess is filling her soup with pepper. There is a huge climax on the lullaby’s “Wow! wow! wow!” refrain, and then the lullaby is repeated, with full forces.

*V. Twinkle, twinkle, little star*

The final song, going back a little to the Mad Hatter's Tea-Party, is the Hatter's absurd distortion of a popular children's rhyme, which Chin amplifies not only with a lot more wordplay but also, of course, with music that spins away from simplicity into its own wonderland.

**Double Concerto** *for piano, percussion and ensemble* (2002)

Composed for the Ensemble InterContemporain, this concerto for solo piano and percussion with an orchestra of nineteen plays continuously for about twenty minutes. The idea of such a concerto came to the composer, she has said, through the experience she had gained in writing for piano and percussion in her piano études, concertos for piano and violin, *Allegro ma non troppo* for percussion and recorded sound, and *Fantaisie mécanique*.

"In this new piece," Chin's note from the time goes, "I try to effect a totally homogeneous fusion of the two instrumental components (soloists and ensemble), so that there emerges just one, new sounding body. The piano is prepared with metal shelf pins in two middle regions, rendering the sound slightly muted and metallic, and with small hooks for four notes in the far bass, which become percussive, these prepared sonorities creating a contrast with the normal sound of other notes. The ensemble represents in a way the shadow of the soloists, who send out impulses as they develop the germinal material, impulses that may prompt one of the ensemble instruments to tell its own story. There is a second percussionist within the ensemble, giving a supplementary coloration to the solo parts by means of very particular effects. The sound world that results has its reference points as much in western as in extra-European music. From there I tried to create music that would be highly colored in its appeal and its expression, agile and free, sometimes completely unpredictable in how it unfolds."

Some of the basic principles, which have to do with similarity and difference, are set out in the opening passage, where not only are the pianist's two hands locked together, worrying at each other as they play alternate notes in the same middle register at speed, but piano and percussion are also yoked together in productive discord. The orchestral percussionist is involved here as well, and soon woodwinds are entering. At the center of the trouble is the piano's E, standing out from a fog of prepared notes and forming the point of departure for the work's large-scale harmonic narrative.



As the composer's description suggests, other stories unwind from this continuing thread: short repeating ideas (such as the sparkling flourishes that are a Chin trademark) or longer melodies that will never be heard again. At the halfway point comes a new condensation, on a high A and the E a fifth above that, with the soloists joined by harp and strings. Much of the piece features this airy space, above all the piano's prepared notes, though the music can be as light and playful in the bass. Toward the end, the middle-register turbidity of the opening returns, this time to signal an extraordinary coda in which the notes of piano and vibraphone seem to be bent by the other instruments.

Program notes by Paul Griffiths

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# About the Artists

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**Brad Lubman**, conductor/composer, is founding co-Artistic Director and Music Director of Ensemble Signal, hailed by *The New York Times* as “one of the most vital groups of its kind.” Since his conducting debut in 1984, he has gained widespread recognition for his versatility, commanding technique, and insightful interpretations. His guest conducting engagements include major orchestras such as the DSO Berlin, Netherlands Radio Kamer Filharmonie, Residentie Orchestra Den Haag, WDR Symphony Cologne, NDR Symphony Hamburg, Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Stuttgart Radio Symphony, Dresden Philharmonic, Deutschland Radio Philharmonie, American Composers Orchestra, and the St Paul Chamber Orchestra, performing repertoire ranging from classical to contemporary orchestral works. He has worked with some of the most important ensembles for contemporary music, including London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Modern, Klangforum Wien, musikFabrik, Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, and Steve Reich and Musicians. He has recorded for AEON, Albany, BMG/RCA, Bridge, Cantaloupe, CRI, Kairos, Koch, Mode, New World, NEOS, Nonesuch, Orange Mountain, and Tzadik. Lubman’s own compositions have

been performed in the U.S. and Europe and can be heard on his CD, *insomniac*, on Tzadik.

Mezzo-soprano **Rachel Calloway** has established herself as one of the most versatile singers of her generation. Praised by *The New York Times* for her “penetrating clarity” and “considerable depth of expression” and by *Opera News* for her “adept musicianship and dramatic flair,” her 2013–2014 season includes performances with Ensemble Signal, Gotham Chamber Opera, the contemporary vocal chamber ensemble Ekmeles, the 2013 Next Wave Festival at BAM, Chameleon Arts Ensemble in Boston, the Amernet String Quartet at Bowdoin University, the Copland House, and American Opera Projects. This summer, she joins the faculty of the Cortona Sessions for New Music in Italy and will sing in the world premiere of Steven Stucky and Jeremy Denk’s opera *The Classical Style* at the Ojai Festival. Ms. Calloway has sung with Lorin Maazel at the Castleton Festival and CalArts, the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s Green Umbrella Series, and the Berkeley Symphony, and at Tulsa Opera, Central City Opera, Gotham Chamber Opera, Opéra de Lille, Athénée Théâtre Louis-

Jovet (Paris, France), and Glimmerglass Opera. She has appeared in concert at The Kennedy Center, Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, the Strathmore Mansion in Maryland, New York Society for Ethical Culture, and Miller Theatre at Columbia University. Ms. Calloway is a founding member of Shir Ami, an ensemble dedicated to the preservation and performance of Jewish art music suppressed by the Nazis and Soviets. She holds degrees from both the Juilliard School (BM) and Manhattan School of Music (MM) and maintains an active teaching studio. [www.rachelcalloway.com](http://www.rachelcalloway.com)

Conductor and pianist **Oliver Hagen** was born in New York City in 1986. In 2010 Hagen was named Assistant Conductor of the Ensemble Intercontemporain in Paris. While there, he worked with Pierre Boulez, former music director Susanna Mälkki, and current music director Matthias Pintscher, among others. Hagen has appeared with ensembles and orchestras such as the Ensemble Intercontemporain, Orchestre National de Lyon, American Composers' Orchestra, the New York New Music Ensemble, Ensemble LPR (le Poisson Rouge), East Coast Contemporary Ensemble, Firebird Ensemble, Ensemble Linea, Ensemble soundinitiative, and the Orchestra of the League of Composers. He served as Assistant Conductor at the Paris Opéra Comique, the Lucerne Festival Academy, the Paris Conservatory Or-

chestra, and "Face the Music," a contemporary music ensemble for high school students, at the Kaufman Center, NYC. As a member of Ensemble Signal since its début in 2008, Hagen has worked closely with composers such as Steve Reich, Helmut Lachenmann, Charles Wuorinen, John Zorn, Oliver Knussen, Michael Gordon, David Lang, and Julia Wolfe. A pianist at the Lucerne Festival Academy from 2005-2009, Hagen appeared under the direction of Boulez as one of the solo pianists in his *Répons* (2009) at the KKL and *sur Incises* (2007-08) at the KKL and Carnegie's Zankel Hall. Hagen holds a bachelor of music degree in clarinet and composition, and a master of music degree in conducting—both from the Eastman School of Music.

New York City-based percussionist **Bill Solomon** was called "a stand out among unfailingly excellent performances" in the *Boston Globe*. He performs with Ensemble Signal, including appearances at Lincoln Center Festival, Tanglewood, Miller Theatre, June in Buffalo, Eastman School of Music, Guggenheim Museum, The Stone, Cleveland Museum of Art, EMPAC and (Le) Poisson Rouge. He's worked with composers including Helmut Lachenmann, Steve Reich, Charles Wuorinen, Brian Ferneyhough, Hilda Paredes, Terry Riley, Oliver Knussen, and Georg Friedrich Haas. In addition to performing with Signal, he also serves as the organization's



Assistant Executive Director. In 2009 he performed the solo vibraphone part for Pierre Boulez's *Répons* in collaboration with the Lucerne Festival, IRCAM, and Ensemble InterContemporain with Mr. Boulez as conductor. Mr. Solomon also performs in vigil ensemble with flutist Kelli Kathman. Recordings can be found on Mode, EUROArts, Cantaloupe, Naxos, New World, Capstone, Tzigane, and Equilibrium labels, as well as Philip Glass's soundtrack to the documentary *Project Rebirth* and a forthcoming release of Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*.

Pianist **Ning Yu** has performed on stages across the United States, Europe, and Asia. Praised for her, "taut and impassioned performance" (*The New York Times*), and "performance with great gusto" (*Chicagoclassicalreview*), she performs with vigor and dedication for both traditional and avant-garde repertoire of the 20th and 21st century. Ning is the winner of the Boucourechliev Prize at the Ninth International Concours de Orléans in France – a competition devoted to piano repertoire from 1900 to today. She has performed on stages such as Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Museum of Modern Art, Contempo at University of Chicago, Köln Philharmonie, Kwai-Tsing Theater in Hong Kong, and Festivals around the world. Ning has given dozens of world premieres, including the works of Terry Riley, Michael Gordon, Cenk Ergün,

Tristan Perich, and Enno Poppe, among others. As a chamber musician, Ning has performed with ensembles such as Bang on A Can - All Stars, Talea Ensemble and she is a member of Yarn/Wire, counter)induction, and Signal Ensemble. In theater, Ning performed with *Mabou Mines' Dollhouse*—a critically acclaimed production directed by Lee Breuer, and she has collaborated with director Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project on the development of the Tony award-nominated play *33 Variations*. Ning is a graduate of Eastman School of Music and Stony Brook University. A native of China, she currently works and lives in New York City. (ningyupiano.com).

**Ensemble Signal**, described by *The New York Times* as "one of the most vital groups of its kind," is a NY-based ensemble offering the broadest possible audience access to a diverse range of contemporary works through performance, commissioning, recording, and education. Since its debut in 2008, the Ensemble has performed over 90 concerts, has given the NY, world, or U.S. premieres of over 20 works, and co-produced five recordings. Signal was founded by Co-Artistic/Executive Director Lauren Radnofsky and Co-Artistic Director/Conductor Brad Lubman. A "new music dream team," (*TimeOutNY*), Signal regularly performs with Lubman and features a supergroup



of independent artists from the modern music scene. Signal is flexible in size and instrumentation—everything from solo to large contemporary ensemble in any possible combination—enabling it to meet the ever-changing demands on the 21st century performing ensemble. At home in concert halls, clubs, and international festivals alike, Signal has performed at Lincoln Center Festival, Ojai Music Festival, Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall, Miller Theatre, (le)Poisson Rouge, The Tanglewood Music Festival of Contemporary Music, Cleveland Museum of Art, The Wordless Music Series, and the Bang on a Can Marathon. Signal's fearless programming ranges from minimalism or pop-influenced to the iconoclastic European avant-garde. Signal has worked with artists and composers including Steve Reich, Helmut Lachenmann, Irvine Arditti, Michael Gordon, David Lang, Julia Wolfe, Oliver Knussen, Hilda Paredes, and Charles Wuorinen. Their educational activities have included workshops with emerging composers at the June in Buffalo Festival, where they are a resident ensemble. Signal's recordings are available on Philip Glass's Orange Mountain, New Amsterdam Records, Mode, and Cantaloupe. Recent highlights include performing in the 2013 Lincoln Center Festival's production of *Monkey: Journey to The West*. Upcoming highlights include the co-commission of a new work for large ensemble by Steve Reich. Ensemble Signal are regular

guests on the Miller Stage, with previous appearances including Composer Portraits of Georg Friedrich Haas (2013), Hilda Paredes (2012), Helmut Lachenmann (2010), and Roger Reynolds (2014) as well as numerous programs of smaller-scale works on Miller's Pop-Up Concert series. This spring, Signal will also perform in the upcoming Reich + Bach concert in the Bach, Revisited series on May 15. Ensemble Signal's season is made possible in part by support from New Music USA's Cary New Music Performance Fund and The Amphion Foundation.

**Tonight's performers:**

Kelli Kathman, *flute*  
Jessica Schmitz, *flutes*  
Christa Robinson, *oboe/English horn*  
Adrián Sandi, *clarinets*  
Brad Balliett, *bassoon/contrabassoon*  
Kate Sheeran, *horn*  
David Byrd-Marrow, *horn*  
Mike Gurfield, *trumpet*  
Felix Del Tredici, *bass trombone*  
Dan Peck, *tuba*  
Carson Moody, *percussion*  
Nuiko Wadden, *harp*  
Olivia DePrato, *violin*  
Pauline Kim Harris, *violin*  
Victor Lowrie, *viola*  
Isabel Hagen, *viola*  
Lauren Radnofsky, *cello*  
Mariel Roberts, *cello*  
Greg Chudzik, *bass*  
Jerry Hou, *page turner*



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# About Miller Theatre

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**Miller Theatre at Columbia University** is the leading presenter of new music in New York City and one of the most vital forces nationwide for innovative programming. In partnership with Columbia University School of the Arts, Miller is dedicated to producing and presenting unique events, with a focus on contemporary and early music, jazz, opera, and multimedia performances. Founded in 1988, Miller has helped launch the careers of myriad composers and ensembles over the past 25 years, serving as an incubator for emerging artists and a champion of those not yet well known in the United States. A three-time recipient of the ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming, Miller Theatre continues to meet the high expectations set forth by its founders—to present innovative programs, support the development of new work, and connect creative artists with adventurous audiences.

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*as of March 1*



# Upcoming Events

**March 24 - 29, noon - 5 p.m., Sat. noon - 8 p.m.**

*at the East Gallery, Maison Française (515 W. 116 Street)*

SPECIAL EXHIBIT

**Barrière's The Garden of Dreams**

**March 29, noon & 1 p.m.**

SPECIAL PERFORMANCE

**Barrière's Distant Mirrors**

Camilla Hoitenga, *flute*

Margaret Lancaster, *flute*

**Saturday, March 29, 8:00 p.m.**

COMPOSER PORTRAITS

**Jean-Baptiste Barrière**

Aliisa Neige Barrière, *violin*

Nathan Davis, *percussion*

Camilla Hoitenga, *flute*

Raphaële Kennedy, *soprano*

Margaret Lancaster, *flute*

**Saturday, April 5, 8:00 p.m.**

*at The Church of St. Mary the Virgin (145 W. 46th Street)*

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The Tallis Scholars

**Thursday, April 10, 8:00 p.m.**

COMPOSER PORTRAITS

**Liza Lim**

International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE)

Karina Cannellakis, *conductor*

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