

**Cleveland Composers Guild
2025-2026 Season
Concert 2: Trinity Brown Bag**

**Wednesday, February 4, 2026 | 12:00 noon
Trinity Episcopal Cathedral
Cleveland, Ohio**

Program

Six Lullabies

Inna Onofrei

Tiny One
Night Has Come
Land of Dreams
Lullaby
Sweet Dreams
Magic Moss

Lauren E. Giles, soprano Maggie Johns, piano

Obscure Words

Ryan Charles Ramer

Rime
Schussing
Sussurus
Apricity
Noctambulism
Pococurantism
Electromagnetism

OPUS 216

Ariel Karas and Amelia Korbitz, violins

Brian Slawta, viola

Trevor Kazarian, violoncello

Pulled Apart

Owen Axelberd

Urgent
Dolorous

Jeff Singler, cello

Adam Whiting, piano

*1st Prize Winner, 13th Annual Cleveland Composers Guild Collegiate
Composition Contest*

Mechanical-Type Love

William Hermanowski

Amelia Korbitz, violin

Jungyu Xu, piano

Six in Four

Nicholas Puin

Gayle Klaber, violoncello

Meditation II

Matthew C. Saunders

Amanda Bekeny, trumpet

Megan Denman, piano

Cheburashka

Margi Griebing-Haigh

Boltovnya (Chatterboxes)

Terry Orcutt, oboe

Christopher Blaha, tuba

Megan Denman, piano

PERFORMERS, COMPOSERS, AND THEIR MUSIC

LULLABIES for voice and piano were written in 2012 when my son, Dominic, was born. Like many parents, I sang and played lullabies to my son as I rocked him to sleep, which inspired me to write these six lullabies. I stumbled across two poems: “Sweet Dreams” by Kimberly L. Brennan-Smith and “Tiny one” by Cheryl Williams, who contributed three more texts to this project. Later I found “Magic Moss” by Russian poet Irina Tokmakova. I chose this poem for its beautiful, poetic and calming setting of a magical and peaceful forest where an owl guards a magic moss that knows a “sleepy spell.”

MAGGIE JOHNS is a doctoral student in piano performance at the Cleveland Institute of Music and hold a bachelor’s degree in piano performance from the University of Maryland. Her career as a collaborative pianist has taken her through New York, Florida, the District of Columbia, and beyond. Maggie recently won 2nd prize in the 2023 American Virtuoso International Music Competition as well as 2nd Prize in the 1st International Music Competition in 2022.

Soprano **LAUREN E. GILES** has been performing since she was a teen, and she primarily teaches voice in Cleveland Heights. She graduated magna cum laude from Marietta College in 2023 with a Bachelor of Music in Music Education and a Certificate of Vocal Pedagogy. She was the twice-consecutive winner of Marietta College’s Vocal Jury Prize, a member of the Mu Psi Kappa music honorary, and completed her training under the dramatic soprano Dr. Amy Yekel.

INNA ONOFREI (Saakova) is an Armenian-American composer and educator living in the Cleveland area. Among the awards and prizes Onofrei has received are Stavropol State Competition for Young Composers, KatePublishing Composition Competition, and HerVoice Composition Competition. One of Onofrei's compositions, written in 1997 about her hometown, Nevinnomyssk, was adopted as the town's anthem. She holds a bachelor’s degree from Stavropol State College of Arts, and masters degrees in piano performance and composition from Cleveland State University.

I. Tiny One

Softly, gently, night has come;
Lay your head down, tiny one;
See the stars as they wink goodnight;
See the moon sending you some light;

Close your little eyes and dream;
Soon you'll see the sun;
Rest in peaceful slumber, dear,
oh sweet tiny one.

—Cheryl Williams

II. Night has come

Night has come
Tiny one
It's time to close your eyes.
Sun is sleeping
Stars are twinkling
And moon is shining bright.

Night has come
Little one
Sweet dreams will come your way
Stars are winking
Sun is sleeping
Til a brand new day
—Cheryl Williams

III. Land of Dreams

May the land of dreams find you, my child.
May your slumber be peaceful and mild.
May the stars shine bright through the night.

May the sun wake you with her light.
Dream, my angel, sweet dreams.
Dream, my darling, sweet dreams.
—Cheryl Williams

IV. Lullaby

Sweet dreams will come your way
The sun brings a brand new day
For now just close your eyes
As I sing this lullaby

The moon shines down on you
The stars are twinkling too
May God in Heaven above
Bless you with His love.
—Cheryl Williams

V. Sweet Dreams

Sweet dreams my darling, the day is done.
The moon is here to say goodnight to the sun.
Gather your blankets and climb into bed.
Close your eyes and lay down your head.

Rest for now with peaceful dreams,
Of twinkling stars and shining moon beams.
Sweet dreams my darling, sweet dreams my love,
Sweet dreams my precious gift from above.
—Kimberly L. Brennan-Smith

VI. Сонная Трава

Дальний лес стоит стеной.
А в лесу, в глуши лесной,
На суку сидит сова.
Там растёт усни-трава.

Говорят, усни-трава
Знает сонные слова.
Как шепнёт свои слова,
Сразу никнет голова.

Я сегодня у совы
 Попрошу такой травы.
Пусть тебе усни-трава
Скажет сонные слова.
—Irina Tokmakova

VI. Magic Moss

In the Forest thick as wall.
In the peaceful darkness,
Owl is resting on a branch.
Watching over magic moss.

They say, sleepy, magic moss
Knows a lot of sleepy spells
You will close your eyes at last
As it speaks its magic spells

I will ask an owl that rests
Just a pinch of magic moss
Just a pinch of sleepy moss
That speaks magic, sleepy spells.
—trans. Inna Onofrei

The titles of the movements of **OBSCURE WORDS** illustrate different elements of the winter season. Seven movements have been chosen for this February concert from the 13 that comprise the entire suite. *Rime* is a word for slippery frost (and the time signature is quite slippery as well!), while *schussing* refers to skiing at high speeds straight down a steep slope. *Sussurus* is the sound wind makes as it stirs the dead leaves that still cling to trees in the winter. *Apricity* is the warmth of the winter sun, and *noctambulism* means sleepwalking (which is most common during the winter months). *Pococurantism* is a word for the ennui that sets in during the cold season, and *electromagnetism* refers to aurora borealis, visible on long, clear winter nights.

Founded in 2012, **OPUS 216** is a multi-genre ensemble with flexible instrumentation that creates performances which are innovative and ever-evolving. From public concerts to intimate private events, recording sessions, film work, television and more, the ensemble has established a unique niche for music-making at a hyper-local level, while touring and performing across the midwest. Their highly acclaimed summer concert series, "Symphony at Sunset," brings hundreds of listeners downtown to North Coast Harbor each week, and their signature Front Yard Concerts are still going strong since their inception in 2020. Founded by violinist Ariel Karas, the ensemble first established itself as a premiere private events ensemble and still performs for hundreds of unique occasions each year, bringing high-level chamber music to events of all kinds. The ensemble has collaborated on special performances for NFL and MLS teams, performed the national anthem for the Cleveland Guardians, and has appeared in nearly every major venue across northeast Ohio. OPUS 216's collection of recordings now includes three full-length albums, with an upcoming EP project in early 2026. Listeners can find their albums on their website and all places streaming online. The ensemble has appeared in spots for film and public television, most recently including the indie film "Lost and Found in Cleveland" (2025).

RYAN CHARLES RAMER served as composer-in-residence at Cleveland Public Theatre from 2023-2025 and as the composer for Gordon Square Classical Concert series from 2017-2022, presenting several concerts each year of Ramer's music in Cleveland's West Side theatre district. He currently resides in his hometown of Medina, Ohio. He has had music performed for string orchestra, choir, opera, piano eight-hands, and various chamber ensembles, including a 2024 a performance in The Netherlands of two pieces for ten cellos. He maintains an active YouTube channel, including several full albums of 8-bit videogames music and soundtracks for complete playthroughs of all three installments in the *King's Quest* series.

PULLED APART is built around, as the title suggests, pulling things apart. In the first movement the two main melodic ideas are pulled apart rhythmically. The first is accelerated and begins to feature smaller and smaller subdivisions as the piece progresses. The second, rough, bluegrass inspired theme on the cello is slowed down

significantly as the piece comes to a close, so much so that it becomes less recognizable as a melody and functions more as a background on which the piano fades out. After the first movement ends and the music has already been pulled apart so to speak, the second movement starts with the two instruments playing solos. Rather than focusing on pulling things apart, this movement focuses on putting back together the ideas that have already been pulled apart. As the piece moves forward, the two instruments play at once more frequently, and finally end as a pair.

Cellist **JEFF SINGLER** is a performer and private cello instructor living and working in the Cleveland area. He teaches at The Oberlin Conservatory Community Music School, The Music Settlement in Cleveland, and privately in Mentor, Lakewood, and Bay Village. He performs solo and chamber music frequently across the Northeast Ohio Region, praised by Cleveland Classical for his "poise and precision" as a performer, and is also in demand as a clinician, coach, and lecturer. Mr. Singler is Principal Cellist of the Youngstown Symphony, Warren Philharmonic and Ashland Symphony, and also regularly appears with the Columbus Symphony, Erie Philharmonic, Akron Symphony, and West Virginia Symphony. He is a member of the Cleveland Chamber Collective, the Lake Effect Piano Trio, the Obsidian String Quartet, and Prism Jazz ensemble. He holds a Master of Music degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music and has taught at both Youngstown State University and Ohio University.

ADAM WHITING is a staff accompanist at the Cleveland Institute of music; he was hired for this position upon graduation from CIM in the spring of 2005 with a double-masters degree in piano performance and accompanying. He is also a new Suzuki piano teacher and returning staff accompanist at the Cleveland Music School Settlement (since 2004) and accompanist for the Sato Center for Suzuki Studies (since 2003). At CIM, he studied solo piano with Daniel Shapiro; collaborative piano with Anita Pontremoli, head of the collaborative piano department; and cello with Merry Peckham, cellist of the Cavani String Quartet. In 2002, he graduated with a BM in performance from Marylhurst University where he studied with Sr. Anne Cecile Daigle SNJM and Susan DeWitt Smith. He attended the Oregon Suzuki Institute for thirteen years; after a few years' hiatus, he returned in the summer of 2004 as a staff accompanist, at the invitation of the directors of the institute. He studied with the Cavani string quartet for six summers at the Britt Chamber Strings Camp in Ashland, Oregon.

OWEN AXELBERD is a Bachelor of Music student at the Cleveland Institute of Music studying composition with Keith Fitch. He is a graduate of Atlanta Music High School where, beyond his compositional training with Phil Sims, he also studied piano and played in several small ensembles. Some of his recent achievements include being a finalist in the 2023 National Young Composers Challenge, a performance from the Greater Cleveland Flute Society, and winning first prize in the 2025 Cleveland Composers Guild Collegiate Composition Competition. Most recently, his piece Drive Down I-81 was premiered by The FAB5 at Mostly Modern Festival.

MECHANICAL-TYPE LOVE poses the question, "How would it sound if a human tried to explain love to a robot?" While I am not quite sure, it might sound something like this!

AMELIA KORBITZ is an American violinist with a passion for new music and collaboration through chamber music. She is the executive director and founder of the Antigone Music Collective, an organization committed to performing music by historically underrepresented composers, advancing the role of women in classical music, and making modern music accessible to modern audiences. Amelia's solo performance highlights include Vivaldi's *le Quattro Stagioni: Primavera* with the West Suburban Symphony, *L'Inverno* and the Beethoven Violin Concerto with the Southern Illinois Music Festival Orchestra, Piazzolla's *Los Cuatros Estaciones Porteñas* with the CCM Philharmonia Orchestra. She has also performed in the Richmond Symphony Orchestra, the Southern Illinois Music Festival Orchestra, and Queen City Opera Orchestra. During the summer, her chamber music experience has led her to festivals including *Musica Le*

Mans and *Musica Malicorne* in France, Ascent Chamber Music Festival, and *Vid Djupid* in Isafjordur, Iceland. Amelia earned her Bachelor of Music degree at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music under the tutelage of Dr. Won-Bin Yim with a Spanish language minor from the University of Cincinnati. She is currently pursuing her Master of Music studies in both performance and Suzuki Pedagogy at the Cleveland Institute of Music under Dr. Olga Dubossarskaya Kaler, where she regularly performs in the New Music Ensemble.

JINGYU XU is a pianist with a strong focus on contemporary music and new music performance. She is an active participant in the new music community, regularly collaborating with composers, participating in readings, and premiering new works. She is particularly interested in the rehearsal process of new music and the role of the performer in shaping interpretation alongside the composer. Jingyu is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the Cleveland Institute of Music, where she studies with Kathryn Brown. She received her Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance with honors from Michigan State University under the guidance of Deborah Moriarty. Originally from Xi'an, China, Jingyu has won prizes in several national piano competitions. Alongside her performance work, she is interested in expanding contemporary piano repertoire and advocating for underrepresented voices through performance and collaboration.

Composer and conductor **WILL HERMANOWSKI**'s music captures vivid images and colors from his personal life and other art forms. Will has collaborated with ensembles, performers, and composers at the Divergent Music Studio, the Atlantic Music Festival, the Emerging Composers Intensive, and the Saint Mary's Composition Intensive. *Dance Adjacent* was presented on Fred Child's national radio broadcast, *Performance Today*. Will's piece also went on to win first prize in the 2024 Ohio Federation of Music Clubs, was the winner of the Bowling Green Concerto Competition, and was a finalist in the 2024 ASCAP Foundation Morton Gould Young Composer Awards Competition. Will was chosen for the KEAR Residency at Bowling Green State University and composed *Distance* for Quince Ensemble. *Distance* went on to win Gold Prize in the 2025 European Classical Music Awards and was recognized as a finalist in the 2025 ASCAP Awards. Will is currently pursuing his DMA at Bowling Green State University.

SIX IN FOUR takes its name from the six themes presented in four different keys, all following a brief introduction, which is restated as unifying material. The piece is cast in a single, continuous movement, moving between the key areas of G-Lydian, E-flat-Lydian, and F-sharp-Aeolian.

GAYLE KLABER (cello) holds her degrees in cello performance from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music where she studied with Peter Wiley. A faculty member at the Baldwin Wallace University Community Arts School, Gayle is also an active performer as a member of the Cleveland Pops Orchestra, Firelands Symphony Orchestra, as well as playing for the Broadway Series at Playhouse Square and performing chamber music. During the summer she arranges music and performs with The Beverley Trio in the US and Canada.

A native Cleveland, **NICHOLAS PUIN** holds a bachelor's degree in music composition from the Berklee College of Music, and a master's degree in music composition and an Ohio teaching certificate from Cleveland State University. His compositions and arrangements have been performed by members of the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, the Singing Angels, the Bop Stop Jazz Unit and most recently the Baldwin-Wallace University and Case-Western Reserve University Jazz Ensembles.

MEDITATION II takes as its inspiration the following passage from the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius:

Watch and see the courses of the stars as if you ran with them, and continually dwell in mind upon the changes of the elements into one another: for these imaginations wash away the foulness of life on the ground. (VIII:44, trans. A.S.L. Farquharson).

The work also reflects my sometime classmate and collaborator Maria Finkelmeier's dictum to "copy yourself," and thus contains allusions to my 2011 composition for band *MORIARTY'S NECKTIE*. Matthew Swihart, another sometime classmate from our Cincinnati days, requested a work that would incorporate both the trumpet and his four-valve flugelhorn, a somewhat rare instrument that extends the range of the "high brass" player into the bass clef. Ossia passages are provided for the standard three-valve instrument heard on today's concert.

DR. AMANDA BEKENY, trumpet, is passionate about mentoring university students on their individual paths as performers and educators. Her students have been successful as members of military bands, performers on Broadway, and as directors high-caliber high school music programs. Currently, she teaches at Kent State University and Cleveland State University. Equally in demand as a performer, Dr. Bekeny is a member of CityMusic Cleveland Chamber Orchestra, the Firelands Symphony Orchestra, and co-founded the Olympic Brass Quintet. She also performs with the all-female Athena Brass band. Dr. Bekeny serves frequently as a substitute musician with other arts organizations in the Great Lakes region including the Erie Philharmonic, the Akron Symphony, Blue Water Chamber Orchestra and the Cleveland Pops Orchestra. Dr. Bekeny serves on the board of the Rocky River Chamber Music Society. She loves exploring the outdoors with her husband and three children.

Pianist **MEGAN DENMAN** hails from Lakewood, Ohio. She earned a bachelor's degree in piano performance from Baldwin-Wallace University and a master's degree from the University of Akron. Her piano instructors have included Robert Mayerovitch and Laura Silverman. She also studied organ with Margaret Scharf and Barbara McGregor. She is an adept collaborative pianist, having served as staff at Baldwin-Wallace, the University of Akron, Cleveland State University, and Kent State University. She maintains a thriving private piano studio and enjoys the shared challenge of guiding each student along their unique musical journey. Megan studied jazz piano with Rock Wehrmann and Ron Drotos, and her working knowledge of jazz and improvisation permeates her teaching and playing. She has also served as pianist for Windsong, Cleveland's Feminist Chorus since August 2023. She seeks out intentional musical projects that coincide with her values and spark creative connection. In her spare time, Megan enjoys gardening, reading, social justice activism and spending time with her nibblings.

DR. MATTHEW C. SAUNDERS (born 1976, Austin, Texas, USA) is a Northeast Ohio composer, conductor, trombonist, husband, and father. He finds inspiration from the vastness of space, the waterways and forests, mountains and prairies of America, the motion of atoms, and the mysteries of existence, and from collaboration with other musicians and his students. After a hard day's work, he relaxes with his wonderful wife, who is the love of his life and his teammate in the extreme sport of parenting. Dr. Saunders is a lover of solitude and camaraderie, Cincinnati-style chili and Carolina barbecue, road trips, movies, and random facts. His favorite dinosaur is the *Parasaurolophus*. He gets excited about music that he would never write or perform, and does what he can to share that with the world. Dr. Saunders is Professor of Music at Lakeland Community College, where he directs the Lakeland Civic Orchestra.

CHEBURASHKA is a whimsical three movement work was inspired by the eponymous Soviet Era children's stop-action film cartoons, which admittedly are scored with wonderfully recognizable music of their own. These cartoons are so charming, so melancholy, and so heartwarming that they just begged for an additional musical interpretation. Heard today, the final movement "*Boltovnya (Chatterboxes)*" froths over with energy, as the two protagonists and friends engage in cartoonish adventures. A true moment of "smiling through tears" — scored for oboe alone — brings about the fade-out ending, where the oboe and tuba continue their silly discourse over a

wheeze-box-accordion-like accompaniment. CHEBURASHKA was premiered the Local 4 Music Fund 2022 “SheScores” festival by today’s three performers.

Oboist **TERRY ORCUTT** currently serves as Principal Oboe with both the Akron Symphony Orchestra (since 2006) and the Canton Symphony Orchestra (since 2001). He also performed as Principal Oboe with the Sarasota Orchestra during the 2015–2016 season. Studying with the renowned John Mack, he earned a masters degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music in 1999. He holds a bachelor's degree from Mannes College of Music. Originally from Medina, Ohio, Terry now resides in Cleveland Heights with his wife, clarinetist Alix Reinhardt.

CHRISTOPHER BLAHA, tuba, serves as professor of tuba and euphonium at the University of Akron and principal tuba with the Springfield Symphony Orchestra. Blaha holds master's and doctoral degrees in tuba performance from the University of Michigan, studying under Fritz Kaenzig, and a bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University with James Akins. Additional teachers have included Craig Knox, Wes Jacobs, Marianne Ploger, Ron Bishop, and Gary Tirey. Before joining Akron, Christopher was assistant professor of tuba and euphonium at Appalachian State University (2009–2014). His former students perform with U.S. military bands, teach in public schools, or pursue graduate studies. He previously held the principal tuba position with the Charleston Symphony Orchestra (2004–2008) and has performed with major ensembles including the Pittsburgh Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Grant Park Music Festival, Toledo Symphony, Charlotte Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Cincinnati Symphony, Ann Arbor Symphony, and Columbus Symphony. During his time in Charleston, he also taught at Charleston Southern University and Armstrong Atlantic State University.

MARGI GRIEBLING-HAIGH writes emotionally resonant music praised by Fanfare Magazine as “conservative enough to find a broad audience, but not at the price of writing down to them.” Her work—often described as lyrical, haunting, and charismatic—spans chamber music, art song, orchestral works, opera, and jazz. She has served as Composer-in-Residence at the Kent/Blossom Music Festival since 2011. She produced the premiere performances of her opera *THE HIGGLER* June 2025; excerpts have been presented by the Cleveland Composers Guild, Cleveland Chamber Symphony, and Cleveland Opera Theater. Her music has been broadcast nationally on Performance Today, Pipe Dreams, With Heart and Voice, and WCLV's Innovations. In December 2025, her full orchestra rendition of *ALEGRÍAS* was featured by the Akron Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Christopher Wilkins in the culminating musical event celebrating Akron's bicentennial. Recent recordings include *VOICES FROM THE OTHER SIDE* (2024), featuring two works for soprano and cello ensemble. Recent compositions include *QUATUOR ROYAL*, *SIEBEN ZUNGENBRECHER*, *Weimarer Winterszenen*, and *LUFTHALTENLIEDER*. Major commissions include *ELEVENSES* (International Double Reed Society), *COMPUTATIS MALEDICTIS* (International Society of Bassists), and *USONIAN GAMES* (Alabama Council for the Arts). Her music is published by Jeanné Inc., Trevco Inc., and her own imprint, Musicallygraphics, and can be heard on twenty CD recordings.