



AMERICAN
COMPOSERS
FORUM

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2019 McKnight Composer Fellows and McKnight Visiting Composers Announced

ST. PAUL, MN – The American Composers Forum (ACF) today announced the recipients of this year's McKnight Fellowships for Composers, funded by the McKnight Foundation. These awards, which include \$25,000 in unrestricted funds for each recipient, are an investment in the artistic and professional development of the selected artists. The four fellows were chosen from a pool of 49 applicants. In another McKnight funded program, two artists from outside Minnesota have been selected as McKnight Visiting Composers. Each receives \$10,000 to spend a minimum of 40 days in Minnesota pursuing a self-designed residency project. This year's panelists were composers Gavin Chuck (Chicago, IL), Elaine Lillios (Bowling Green OH), and Gilda Lyons (Rhinebeck, NY).

The 2019 McKnight Composer Fellows are: Aleksandr Brusentsev (Minneapolis, MN)
James G. Everest (Minneapolis, MN)
Asuka Kakitani (Northfield, MN)
Stefon Bionik Taylor (Minneapolis, MN)

The 2019 McKnight Visiting Composers are: Sergio Barer (Valley Village, CA)
Danny Clay (San Francisco, CA)

About the McKnight Composer Fellows

Aleksandr Brusentsev (Minneapolis, MN) <https://www.brusenta.com/>

Aleksandr Brusentsev tells abstract stories with sound. Through shifting perspectives, his works articulate spaces and paradoxes that invite listeners to empathetically engage with fundamental questions and draw personal conclusions. His music has been performed internationally and

lauded by artists and audiences alike.

Highlights include premieres by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the CHROMA Ensemble, the Royal Academy of Music Manson Ensemble, Nicola Melville, Hannah Spivey, Alexandra Wood with Huw Watkins, and Ensemble Eroica with soloist Imogen Hancock, who premiered Brusentsev's flugelhorn concerto, *Threads*, under the baton of conductor Toby Thatcher.



photo by Joe Sarah

Threads was made possible by an award from The Jerome Fund for New Music. Brusentsev's other recognitions include a 2019 grant from the Schubert Club, 'high commendation' in both the Alan Bush and Eric Coates composition prizes at the Royal Academy of Music, as well as a 'Distinction' on his Master's thesis, a project called 'Connect. The.Dots,' which sought to demystify the composition process by bringing composer, performer, and listener into one space and one conversation.

Brusentsev is an alumnus of the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Young Composer program, an associate on the London Symphony Orchestra Soundhub scheme, and a member of the American Composers Forum. His primary teachers have been Alex Freeman at Carleton College (BA) and Huw Watkins at the Royal Academy of Music (MMus).

Brusentsev's compositions are published exclusively by his company, 'i do dots music.' The complete catalog can be found at brusenta.com/music.

James G. Everest (Minneapolis, MN) <https://jgeverest.com/>

Composer / Director / Multidisciplinary Artist / Historian JG Everest creates site-specific performance installations that connect the histories, ecology, and cultures of places and communities, using spatial sound design as an integral compositional element. He has worked as music director and performer for numerous projects including over a decade each with Catalyst Dance and Roma di Luna. He regularly teaches music, sound design, and listening approaches to students of varied backgrounds, in workshops and private lessons.



photo by Erin Westover

Everest frequently works with performing poets and storytellers, as well as sculptors, dance artists, and video/photo artists to create immersive installation experiences. In 2015, he launched the ongoing **INMiGRATION** site-specific performance series which features his roving Free Range Orchestra & Choir and experimental music collective Sans Le Systeme.

In 2016, he founded **Wavelets Creative**, a community Arts organization dedicated to bringing people together in new ways, through immersive arts experiences, often emphasizing connections to the natural world. In 2016, he co-created and directed the site-specific performance **MY OCEAN** at the Ordway Prairie nature preserve in Pope County, Minnesota; developed and directed the Monarch Magic! community Art + Nature workshop

series at Lake Nokomis Park; and curated and directed the **Monarch Magic! Sound Garden** at the Minneapolis Monarch Festival.

In 2018, Everest designed, composed, directed, and presented his site-specific *Water Suite: Four Seasonal Sound Gardens* at four different outdoor sites around Minnesota, one for each season of the year. Each event featured a spatial soundscore played through 35+ independent speakers, each playing a different part of the whole piece of music.

Asuka Kakitani (Northfield, MN) <https://www.asukakakitani.com/>

"A musical impressionist and supreme colorist" (*Hot House Magazine*) aptly characterizes the Japanese-born composer Asuka Kakitani. Her deep love for nature and animals inspires Kakitani to transform her imagination into epic musical stories that *DownBeat Magazine* described as brimming with "sumptuous positivity and organic flow."

She is the founder of the 18-piece ensemble the Asuka Kakitani Jazz Orchestra, and their first recording *Bloom* has been featured on the international radio program PRI's The World, acknowledged as one of the best debut albums of the year by *DownBeat Magazine* Critics' Poll and NPR Music Jazz Critics' Poll, and All About Jazz called it "absolutely superb."



photo by Hanayo Takai

After she relocated to Minnesota from Brooklyn, NY in 2016, she co-founded the Twin Cities Jazz Composers' Workshop, which aims to foster creative and forward-looking composition for the modern jazz orchestra in the Twin Cities area. Kakitani also co-founded and conducts Inatnas Orchestra with her husband, composer/trombonist JC Sanford, that features both of

their music and some of the best jazz musicians in the twin cities area.

Kakitani has been the recipient of grants and awards including from Jerome Fund for New Music from the American Composers Forum, Brooklyn Arts Council, American Music Center, and the BMI Charlie Parker Award. Inatnas Orchestra will make their first appearance at Crooners Lounge in July. Spreading her wings beyond jazz big band, Kakitani's new string quartet piece inspired by birds will be premiered at the Bridge Chamber Music Festival in Northfield, MN in August.

Stefon Bionik Taylor (Minneapolis, MN) <https://bionikmusic.com/>



photo by Brandon Sweet

Like the part-man, part-machine allusions of his nickname, Stefon Bionik Taylor is at one in both acoustic and electronic realms. As a producer and performer, a composer and collaborator who brings out the best in those around him, that Bionik theory works. Taylor has composed, arranged, and collaborated on Pop, Hip-Hop, R & B, Reggae, Soul and Funk records with classic and contemporary artists ranging from Phil Collins to Lizzo. He's been in the studio with legendary producers like George Martin (The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix) and Peter Mokran (Aaliyah, Mary J. Blige, The Flaming Lips). His original compositions and productions have been synced in the *Fast and Furious* series, *Grownish* television show, *Power Rangers Movie*, *NBA 2K* and *Trials Rising* video game series, and many more. Bionik is currently a COMPAS resident artist, and an instructor at Slam Academy.

About the McKnight Visiting Composers

Sergio Barer (Valley Village, CA) <https://sergiobarer.net/>

Sergio Barer is a composer and pianist who was born in Mexico City and studied with Cuban pianists Marcia Freyre and Marcia Freyre de Andrade in Mexico, and then with Mario Feninger and Ian Brooks in the United States. He made his concert debut in Mexico in 1985 and appeared on TV in a show called Estudio 54 several times. In the late eighties he injured his left hand and performed music for one hand for several years, recording the CD "Piano Music for One Hand". After several years of work with Dorothy Taubman and Nina Scolnik, Barer was able to resume playing with both hands. However, when he came back he did so performing his own music, as his mentor, Mario Feninger, had taught him the basics of composition in the nineties. In 2005, Barer recorded his CD "Almost Songs", which The Jamestown Post-Journal called "sensational listening". In 2006, ERM Music recorded his First Piano Concerto in Kiev and issued it as part of their Masterworks of the New Era series. His Second Piano



photo by KI Concerts

Concerto was recorded in 2013 in Bratislava and came out in the CD “Memories of my Childhood”. Through the advice of his friend Stephen Paulus, Barer started to pursue the composition of choral music in the 2010s. In 2015, the San Fernando Valley Master Chorale named him their Composer- in-Residence, a position he still holds. In 2017, the SFVMC premiered Barer’s “Moses, an Oratorio”, in Los Angeles, and it has continued championing his works.

Sergio’s comments regarding his McKnight Visiting Composer Residency: My project is called The Immigrants. Being myself an immigrant from Mexico and seeing that in several parts of the United States there is a growing anti-immigrant sentiment, I decided to do something about it, put in my two cents, so to speak. The project consists of interviewing several families of Mexican origin, then sitting down and writing three different choral pieces about their stories and, finally, to have the works performed by choirs in Minneapolis-St. Paul. I had thought originally of

using only high school choirs but I realized that they can also be college choirs or community choirs, so that the works reach different sectors of society. I find that most of our problems come from lack of communication with an area. Only when you are not familiar with a person or group, only when you don’t know who they are, what their story is, what they stand for and what they actually do, only then can you swallow lies about them and agree to demonize them. This being a nation of immigrants, I think these stories will make many people realize that Americans of all ethnic origins have more things in common than they have differences. I hope this realization will lead people to shed some of their prejudices, which sometimes are very hard to spot in oneself, and to live more enjoyable lives in their own communities through understanding and respect.

Danny Clay (San Francisco, CA) <https://www.dclaymusic.com/>

Danny Clay is a composer whose work is deeply rooted in curiosity, collaboration, and the sheer joy of making things with people of all ages and levels of artistic experience. Working closely with artists, students, and community members alike, he builds worlds of inquiry, play, and perpetual discovery that integrate elements of sound, movement, theater, and visual design. Children's games, speculative systems, cognitive puzzles, invented notation, found objects, imaginary archives, repurposed media, micro-improvisations, and happy accidents all make frequent appearances in his projects.



photo by John Fisher

Recent collaborators include Kronos Quartet, Eighth Blackbird, Third Coast Percussion, the San Francisco Girls Chorus, Volti, Wu Man, Sarah Cahill, Jon Fischer, Phyllis Chen, fourth graders from Buckeye Valley West Elementary School in Delaware, Ohio, and several of his elementary and middle school-level music students in the Bay Area. His work has been performed by the International Contemporary Ensemble, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, Ensemble Dal Niente, and has been presented by San Francisco Performances, the St. Louis Symphony’s Pulitzer Series, the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts at the Minnesota Street Project, the Meaney Center for

the Arts in Seattle, and university programs throughout the United States. He works at an after-school program in San Francisco called Little Opera, where he helps fourth and fifth graders compose and perform their own original operas.

Danny's comments regarding his McKnight Visiting Composer Residency:

If a group of young vocalists co-composed a new piece for a professional choir, what would they make?

If a professional ensemble worked together to create a new composition specifically for an amateur children's chorus, what sorts of ideas and sounds would ensue?

How would the simultaneous act of making, learning and teaching new music across experience levels affect both groups as musical citizens? My McKnight Visiting Composer Residency will probe these questions by facilitating a collaborative musical dialogue between an established professional adult vocal ensemble and a youth community chorus program. These two groups, which will vary significantly in age, background, and training, will participate in this musical exchange over the course of several weeks. Using Danny's "playbook," a game-based method of sound and movement creation, the groups will build dynamic, playful compositions for each other to learn and perform. The residency will culminate in a joint concert program that showcases their two new compositions for one another.

About the McKnight Artist Fellowships Program

Founded on the belief that Minnesota thrives when its artists thrive, the McKnight Foundation's arts program is one of the oldest and largest of its kind in the country. Support for individual working Minnesota artists has been a cornerstone of the program since it began in 1981. The McKnight Artist Fellowships Program provides annual, unrestricted cash awards to outstanding mid-career Minnesota artists in 10 different creative disciplines. Program partner organizations administer the fellowships and structure them to respond to the unique challenges of different disciplines. Currently the foundation contributes about \$1.7 million per year to its statewide fellowships. For more information, visit mcknight.org/artistfellowships.

About the McKnight Foundation

The McKnight Foundation, a family foundation based in Minnesota, advances a more just, creative, and abundant future where people and planet thrive. Program interests include regional economic and community development, Minnesota's arts and artists, education equity, youth engagement, Midwest climate and energy, Mississippi River water quality, neuroscience research, international crop research, and rural livelihoods. Founded in 1953 and independently endowed by William and Maude McKnight, the Foundation has assets of approximately \$2.2 billion and grants about \$90 million a year.

About the American Composers Forum

The **American Composers Forum** (ACF) enriches lives by nurturing the creative spirit of composers and communities. Through commissions, grants, mentorships, performances, publications, residencies, and hosted gatherings, we provide innovative opportunities for composers and their music to flourish, and we link communities and composers through creation, connection, and engagement. ACF facilitates an ecosystem that reflects the diversity of our world, and we partner with a variety of creative musicians and organizations to develop the next generation of new music creators, performers, and advocates. Visit www.composersforum.org for more information.

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