

THE AMHERST COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC
PRESENTS

Helen Sung, piano
Quartet+

with

John Ellis, saxophone and flutes

David Wong, bass

Adam Cruz, drums

+

The Wistaria Quartet:

Kaila Graf, violin

Laura Arpiainen, violin

Gregory Diehl, viola

Wayne Smith, cello

Friday, October 1, 2021 • Buckley Recital Hall • 8 PM

MUSIC AT **AMHERST** SERIES

PROGRAM

Quartet+

Program will be announced from the stage

Please silence your mobile phone, pager, watch, or any other electronic noise-makers during the concert. Please refrain from using electronic devices with light-producing screens, as they are distracting to your fellow audience members.

Cameras and recording devices are strictly prohibited.

THE ARTISTS

Helen Sung

A native of Houston, Texas, and alumna of its High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, Helen moved away from her classical piano upbringing after a chance encounter with jazz at a Harry Connick, Jr., concert during undergraduate studies at UT Austin. She went on to become part of the inaugural class of the Thelonious Monk Institute (now the Herbie Hancock Institute) at the New England Conservatory of Music, and to win the Kennedy Center's Mary Lou Williams Piano Competition. Her recent releases, *Sung With Words* (Stricker Street), a collaborative project with renowned poet Dana Gioia funded by a Chamber Music America New Jazz Works Grant, and *Anthem For A New Day* (Concord Jazz), topped the jazz charts. Helen and her band have performed at major American festivals and venues including Monterey, SFJAZZ, Newport, and Carnegie Hall. Internationally, her "NuGenerations" Project toured southern Africa as a U.S. State Department Jazz Ambassador, and recent engagements include debuts at the London Jazz Festival, Jazz at Lincoln Center Shanghai, Blue Note Beijing, and the Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival.

She has performed with such luminaries as the late Clark Terry, Wayne Shorter, Ron Carter, Wynton Marsalis (who named her as one of his "Who's Got Next: Jazz Musicians to Watch!"), MacArthur Fellow Regina Carter, Terri Lyne Carrington, Cecile McLorin Salvant, and the Mingus Big Band. Helen is a Steinway Artist and has served on the jazz faculties of Berklee College of Music, the Juilliard School, and Columbia University, where she also was the inaugural jazz artist-in-residence, pursuing the intersection of jazz and neuroscience, at its prestigious Mortimer B. Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior Institute. In 2021, she was awarded a Guggenheim

Fellowship and also released her vinyl debut, a duo recording with trumpeter Marquis Hill called *Everybody's Waltz* (JMI Records).

John Ellis

The gifted, versatile multi-instrumentalist/composer occupies a space directly between the celebratory, welcoming spirit of New Orleans and the edgy, frantic streets of New York City. He is both the leader of his own eclectic projects and an in-demand sideman.

Ellis leads his own quintet of A-list players featuring Mike Moreno (guitar), Aaron Goldberg (piano), Matt Penman (bass), and Rodney Green (drums). Their Criss Cross release *It's You I Like* includes songs by singer-songwriter Elliott Smith and legendary kids' TV host Mr. Rogers.

An ambitious composer as well as an agile musician, Ellis has composed three large-scale narrative pieces commissioned by The Jazz Gallery in collaboration with playwright Andy Bragen. His *MOBRO* (released in 2014 on Parade Light), looks at environmental issues through the story of the infamous MOBRO 4000 trash barge.

David Wong

Classically trained bassist David Wong was born and raised in New York City. In 2004, he graduated from the Juilliard School. He studied with Orin O'Brien (New York Philharmonic), Ron Carter, Ben Wolfe, and John Clayton. Wong is currently a member of Roy Haynes' Fountain of Youth band, the Heath Brothers quartet led by jazz legends Jimmy Heath and Albert "Tootie" Heath, The Benny Green Trio, and the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. Wong was the last bass player in Hank Jones' Great Jazz Trio, and is featured on the piano master's last recording. He is on the faculty at Temple University, The New School, and The City College of New York.

Adam Cruz

A creative force on the international jazz scene for the last two decades, drummer and composer Adam Cruz is best known for his work with Danilo Perez, Steve Wilson, David Sanchez, and Edward Simon. Cruz was born in New York City. He worked extensively with saxophonist David Sanchez and the Mingus Big Band during the 1990s. He then toured with Chick Corea, recording *Origin - A Week at the Blue Note*, and spent the end of the 90's touring in a duo setting with guitarist Charlie Hunter.

In recent years, Cruz has forged a steady musical relationship with pianist Danilo Perez, and is a member of the Danilo Perez Trio, which also features bassist Ben Street. His teachers have included his father - percussionist Ray Cruz, Frank Malabe, Keith Copeland, Kenny Washington, and Joe Chambers. He has also worked at various

times with artists such as Tom Harrell, Chris Potter, Pharaoh Sanders, John Patitucci, Paquito D’Rivera, and many more. Cruz’s remarkable musicianship makes him one of the most in-demand drummers of the day. In 2010 he was awarded a grant from the Aaron Copland Fund for Music to record *Milestone*, his debut recording as a composer and bandleader released on Sunnyside Records in April 2011.

The Wistaria Quartet

Kaila Graf, violin

Laura Arpiainen, violin (for Sarah Briggs)

Gregory Diehl, viola

Wayne Smith, cello

The Wistaria String Quartet formed in 2013 to perform as part of Amherst College’s Copland Colloquium. Since its inception, Wistaria has maintained strong ties to the College, where Wistaria musicians frequently perform new works by faculty and students. Faculty collaborations include the premiere in 2016 of a work for saxophone, live electronics, and string quartet by Jason Robinson, Associate Professor of Music. In 2019 the Quartet performed Professor Eric Sawyer’s *String Quartet No. 2* at the Five College New Music Festival, and collaborated with Darryl Harper, Associate Professor of Music, on a recording of Ryan Truesdell’s *Suite for Clarinet and String Quartet*.

As musicians living in the Pioneer Valley, the members of Wistaria String Quartet share a commitment to highlighting works of local composers. The Quartet premiered Zeke Hecker’s *String Quartet No. 2* in 2016 at Springfield’s Tuesday Morning Music Club. In 2017, Wistaria recorded an album of string quartets by composer Scott Slapin, and premiered several of his works. The Quartet has appeared in a number of local concert series and venues, including Plainfield’s Concerts at 7, the Montague Bookmill, the Summit House Sunset Concert Series, and a benefit concert sponsored by Watermelon Wednesdays in which the Quartet performed with fiddler Darol Anger’s band “Mr. Sun.”

QUARTET+

Pianist/composer and 2021 Guggenheim Fellow Helen Sung celebrates the work of influential women composers on her latest album *Quartet+*, crafting new arrangements of tunes by Geri Allen, Carla Bley, Mary Lou Williams, Marian McPartland and Toshiko Akiyoshi, while carrying the tradition forward with her own stunning new works. Co-produced by violin master Regina Carter, the album pairs Sung’s quartet with the strings of the GRAMMY® Award-winning Harlem Quartet in an inventive meld of jazz and classical influences.

Available September 17, 2021, on Sunnyside Records, *Quartet+* was conceived and produced during the Covid-19 pandemic, and made

possible by a grant from the NYC Women's Fund for Media, Music and Theatre with additional support from the Aaron Copland Fund for Music and the Queens Arts Council. It allowed Sung, who also studied classical violin, to realize a long-held dream of writing for strings while maintaining the improvisatory spark of her stellar quartet.

The double quartet format is the latest evolution of Sung's career-long search for inspiration beyond the boundaries of jazz. Her classical background emerged before, on 2007's *Sunbird* (After Albéniz). *Sunbird's* title track is reprised for *Quartet+*, and is a thrilling dialogue between modern jazz and 19th century Romanticism. Her most recent album, *Sung With Words*, incorporated the words of poet Dana Gioia, while upcoming projects delve into the pianist's Asian-American heritage, and the intersection of jazz and neuroscience.

While the Houston native veered away from her classical training after undergraduate studies at the University of Texas at Austin, Sung admits that early influences have maintained a strong pull on her musical thinking. "I guess I can't escape my classical heritage," she says with a laugh. "It's definitely part of how I hear and how I write."

It also gives her a connoisseur's ear for the many ways in which jazz and classical music have converged, not always successfully. "Since I also studied violin, I'm really picky about how I want it to sound in a jazz setting," she explains. "When I first heard Regina Carter, she was playing with Kenny Barron at the Blue Note, and I remember thinking, 'That's how I would want to play jazz violin.' When I heard the Harlem Quartet I had that same feeling."

Sung crossed paths with the acclaimed string quartet during a cross-genre performance with clarinetist Eddie Daniels at Jazz at Lincoln Center in 2018. She immediately approached the musicians after the show to suggest a collaboration. The opportunity came through the NYC Women's Fund grant, which gave the project a direction Sung had not previously ventured into with her own music, following, as it did, on work undertaken with Terri Lyne Carrington's Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice, and Roxy Coss' Women In Jazz Organization.

"In the past I tried to avoid the whole 'women in jazz' thing because I felt music should speak for itself," she says. "But as I've gotten older, I've begun to feel that's not the most complete way to deal with it. So I'm starting to grapple with the issues, and will do my best to approach things with honesty and candor."

It's hardly the first time she's explored the work of the composers represented on *Quartet+*, however. In 2007 she won the Kennedy Center's Mary Lou Williams Jazz Piano Competition, and has since paid tribute to the history-spanning pianist at Harlem Stage and on NPR. She was a guest on Marian McPartland's revered Piano Jazz in 2006, and performed in tributes to Geri Allen in the wake of Allen's untimely death in 2017.

Allen's "Feed the Fire" begins the album in dramatic fashion, with a striking new counter melody added to the original's blistering rhythms. Williams' "Mary's Waltz" is refashioned in a way that draws from the classical tradition as well as the blues, a multi-faceted approach that the history-spanning composer would surely have appreciated. Sung heard a symphonic element to Akiyoshi's "Long Yellow Road" which she elaborated on in her arrangement, while "Wrong Key Donkey" vividly captures the originality and eccentricity of Carla Bley's complex whimsy.

Sung's homage to McPartland fuses a string quartet rewrite of "Melancholy Mood" with a group improvisation on "Kaleidoscope," the theme from McPartland's iconic radio show. These pieces are interspersed with snippets of Dr. Billy Taylor's "A Grand Night for Swinging", which Sung discovered on a Mary Lou Williams' recording. Sung decided to add it to the album in order to honor Taylor's early championing of female jazz musicians, which included founding the Mary Lou Williams Women In Jazz Festival.

Sung's original composition "Coquette" was inspired by one of German composer Clara Schumann's "Romance" pieces, and includes Ellis' playful, lilting flute flirting with the elegant strings.

"Lament for Kalief Browder," dedicated to the Bronx teenager who committed suicide following his arduous three-year imprisonment without trial at Rikers Island, was previously recorded on *Sung With Words*. Sung had long envisioned the piece with strings, and realized it here in a breathtaking rendition. "Sungbird," meanwhile, is reimagined from the original's Latin-inflected jazz quintet version as a passionate dance sans drums.

While the entire album was created during the pandemic, the two-movement "Temporality," a Jazz Coalition commission, directly addresses the strange year (and counting) we've all just come through. "The way I experienced time became very elastic during the pandemic," Sung says. "Each day felt interminably long, one blurring into the next, and then suddenly an entire month had passed! 'Time Loops' is about that, while 'Elegy for the City' is my lament for the terrible human loss suffered by New York and other cities."

Despite the stresses of the pandemic, Sung is enjoying a particularly fruitful period, with several fascinating projects in the works in addition to the release of *Quartet+*. She'll apply her 2021 Guggenheim Fellowship to a multi-movement piece for big band slated for completion in 2022. With a Chamber Music America Digital Residency grant, she's producing a series of events this year using the recent tragic attacks on the AAPI community as a catalyst for interdisciplinary events with her quartet and a poet, a DJ, and an installation artist. Sung also received a New Music USA 2021 Music Creator Development Fund grant for a collaborative project with dancer and neuro-rehabilitation researcher Miriam King to create a dance program with original music for dementia/Alzheimer's patients. Sung remarks, "If I've learned anything this past year and a half, it's to not take anything for granted, be it people, relationships, opportunities...so I'm jumping in with arms wide open. I want to swallow life whole!"



Amherst College Music Department Upcoming Events

October 2021

- 7,14** **Jazz@Friedmann Room.** Keefe Campus Center. 9 PM
- 15** **M@A Presents: Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP)**
"Low Spratlan and Friends" WBGH. Event Live Stream. 8 PM
- 21** **Jazz@Friedmann Room.** Keefe Campus Center. 9 PM
- 22** **Amherst College Choral Society Family Weekend Concert**
Buckley Recital Hall. 8 PM
- 23** **Amherst College Jazz Ensemble Family Weekend Concert**
Buckley Recital Hall. 12 PM
- 23** **Amherst College Symphony Orchestra (ASO) Family Weekend**
Concert. Buckley Recital Hall. 8 PM
- 24** **M@A Masterclasses:** Catalyst String Quartet 10 AM,
Anthony McGill, Clarinet 5:30 PM. Buckley Recital Hall
- 24** **M@A Presents: Catalyst Quartet with Anthony McGill,**
Clarinet. Buckley Recital Hall. 3 PM

November 2021

- 6 Senior Theses: William Fishell '21 and Elijah Quastler '21**
Buckley Recital Hall. 7 PM and 8:30 PM
- 12 Amherst College Jazz Ensemble Homecoming Concert**
Buckley Recital Hall. 8 PM
- 13 Amherst College Choral Society Homecoming Concert**
Buckley Recital Hall. 6 PM
- 13 Amherst Symphony Orchestra (ASO) Homecoming Concert**
Buckley Recital Hall. 8:30 PM
- 15 Senior Thesis: Seohyun Hong '22, Flute.**
Buckley Recital Hall. 4 PM

December 2021

- 3 Amherst College Jazz Ensemble Concert (ACJE)**
Buckley Recital Hall. 8 PM
- 4 Amherst Symphony Orchestra (ASO) Concert.** Buckley Recital
Hall. 8 PM
- 5 Amherst College Choral Society Vespers.** Johnson Chapel.
Time TBD

Unless noted, all concerts held in Buckley Recital Hall

413.542.2195 / concerts@amherst.edu

Alisa Pearson, Manager of Concert Programing, Production and Publicity