

“California’s redwoods, sequoias, and Joshua trees define the American West and nature’s resilience through the ages. Wildfires last year were their deadliest test.” – The New York Times

The Soraya Presents the World Premiere of *Treeology*

Thursday, February 23, 2023

The Soraya commissioned three composers -- **Billy Childs, Steven Mackey, and Gabriella Smith** -- to honor California’s beloved and threatened native tree species the giant sequoia, the coastal redwood, and the Joshua trees

They will create *Treeology*—a three-part musical reflection in response to California’s recent deadly wildfires, the most destructive in history

(Los Angeles, CA) June 22, 2022 | For thousands of years, California's ancient forests stood as symbols of permanence. But the fierce wildfires that ravaged the state the last two years jeopardize the existence of these mighty trees, which are among the longest-living organisms on Earth.

In response to this threat, and as a call to action, the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts’ Executive and Artistic Director **Thor Steingraber** commissioned three contemporary composers—**Billy Childs, Steven Mackey, and Gabriella Smith**—each with deep roots in California and each with their own original musical voice to create *Treeology*, new compositions to honor three of the trees most in danger. LA’s prolific multi-genre composer **Billy Childs** will honor the giant sequoias; Grammy Award-winning guitarist and educator **Steven Mackey** reflects on the endangered coastal redwoods; and San Francisco Bay Area environmentalist and composer **Gabriella Smith** pays tribute to the disappearing Joshua trees.

Treeology will receive its world premiere on Thursday, February 23, 2023 at The Soraya. The chamber music ensemble **Delirium Musicum** will perform in all three pieces. **Steven Mackey** will join them in the piece he composed about the coastal redwood, playing electric guitar. The **Billie Childs Quartet** led by Childs at the piano will join Delirium Musicum in the piece he composed about the giant sequoia. In **Gabriella Smith's** piece dedicated to the Joshua Tree,

the ensemble will be supplemented by electronic samplings Smith has been creating from her time spent in the desert.

Plans include subsequent **Treelogy** performances at campuses throughout California, as part of a multidisciplinary program that brings together artists and academics around the important issues of ecology and fire response.

Treelogy Background

In 2020, wildfires ravaged California's ancient forests and roared through her canyons and mountain passes. It was a pattern that would repeat to the north and east in Oregon and Colorado. *California's epic wildfires in 2020 took aim at the state's most beloved trees. In a relative instant, countless ancient redwoods, hundreds of giant sequoias and more than one million Joshua trees perished. The blackened wreckage sends a clear message. These trees are in the fight of their lives.*

Those are the words of *New York Times* journalist John Branch. He and photojournalist Max Wittaker chronicled the 2020 destruction to California's most iconic and beloved trees in their story [They're Among The World's Oldest Living Things. The Climate Crisis is Killing Them](#). The story touched upon the crisis facing Californians and people around the world, many of whom face natural disasters with greater frequency and impact. In California, however, these tree species cannot be rebuilt or relocated. They are thousands of years old and are as central to the state's identity as its ecology.

Inspired by this stunning reporting, Steingraber sought to create a musical response to the fires, and a call to action to save these precious trees. He enlisted three renowned composers and violinist Etienne Gara to create **Treelogy**, a three-part concert to be unveiled on February 23, 2023. Gara, violinist and founder of the chamber ensemble Delirium Musicum, is the current Artist-in-Residence at The Soraya. He and his partner, violinist YuEun Kim, spent much of the pandemic traveling throughout California in a restored VW bus, bringing their [Musikaravan's](#) live music to remote locations and rural communities. With a backdrop of California's wilderness and awe-inspiring vistas, sometimes Gara and Kim performed solely for nearby flora and fauna, a journey that inspired Gara to tackle broader issues with his music.

The Soraya and Gara's Delirium Musicum will partner on **Treelogy**. Their aspiration is to bring **Treelogy** to every college campus in California. For that purpose, they will invite scientists, educators, activists, and advocates to come together in an unprecedented multi-disciplinary effort aimed at bringing a sense of purpose and common understanding to the threats faced by California's resources.

In the midst of so much destruction, music can be a source of hope and understanding. In his article, Branch illustrates another. *"As if to provide more proof of its resilience, even when a*

redwood is chopped down it is not always defeated. Dead redwoods often sprout several more trees around the stump, a “fairy ring” that defines second-growth forests.”

Treeology is much like that fairy ring that will appear throughout California’s concert halls and campuses in 2023 giving further visibility to the issues of climate change for the next generations of Californians.

The Soraya and Sustainability

CSUN is nationally recognized for its sustainability practices, which are also mirrored in the activities of The Soraya. In addition to regular operations that are guided by sustainable practices and awareness, The Soraya is a trailblazer in incorporating sustainability in its programs and work with artists. “The performing arts are not exempt from the important work of contributing to a more sustainable planet, and more so, musicians and performers of every sort can bring new perspectives to this important work and contribute to public awareness,” says Steingraber, an avid environmental advocate.

The Soraya’s prior sustainability focused programs include the “*Global Currents*” festival in 2017 where artists from 13 nations explored themes of water conservation, and 2019’s “*Future Currents: L.A. River*,” a six-month large-scale collaboration between CSUN students and local activists and eco-artists created to foster awareness of some of the environmental challenges faced by the Los Angeles River.

In addition to its LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold certified venue—a rarity among performing arts centers—the 1700-seat Soraya has been nationally recognized with the 2019 Sustainability Award by Ticketmaster for its environmentally green practices and programs.

About the Treeology Composers

Billy Childs / the Giant Sequoias

Los Angeles-based, Grammy Award-winning composer Billy Childs, who will explore the giant sequoia with his composition, is renowned for his multi-genre works. Childs grew up immersed in jazz, classical, and pop music influences. A piano prodigy, Childs was already performing publicly by age six, and at 16, he was admitted to the USC Community School of the Performing Arts, going on to earn a Bachelor of Music degree in composition. In addition to his work as a pianist with Yo-Yo Ma, Sting, Wynton Marsalis, and Chick Corea, Childs has been an in-demand composer for decades. He has been awarded orchestral and chamber commissions by the Kronos Quartet, Rachel Barton Pine, Los Angeles Master Chorale, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra.

Steven Mackey / the Coastal Redwoods

Grammy Award-winning composer Steven Mackey is regarded as one of the leading composers of his generation, with compositions ranging from orchestral and chamber music to dance and

opera. His first musical passion was playing the electric guitar in rock bands in Northern California, where he grew up among the redwoods, which will be the focus of his contribution to *Treelogy*, as he taps into those Northern California roots. He blazed a trail in the 1980s and '90s by including the electric guitar and vernacular music influences in his classical composition. He regularly performs his own work, including electric guitar concertos and numerous solo and chamber works. Mackey's orchestral music has been performed by major orchestras around the world, including the San Francisco and Chicago Symphonies, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, and Tokyo Philharmonic. Mackey has been a faculty of Princeton for more than 30 years.

Gabriella Smith / the Joshua Trees

Composer and environmentalist Gabriella Smith grew up in the Bay Area, playing and writing music, hiking, backpacking, and volunteering on a songbird research project in Point Reyes. Smith loves exploring new sounds with voices, electronics, or other instruments, and connecting listeners with the natural world. Many of her works address the climate crisis and provide listeners with an emotional connection to the natural world, along with a plea for action. As an upcoming composer, she has already received commissions from major ensembles and festivals including Bravo! Vail Music Festival, and Los Angeles Philharmonic where her *Breathing Forests* premiered in February 2022. She was also featured composer in the 2021 Ojai Festival. The focus of her work will be the Joshua tree.

About Delirium Musicum/Étienne Gara

Founded in 2018, the self-conducted chamber orchestra Delirium Musicum provides impassioned and engaging musical performances that deeply connect the audience to the musicians. Influenced by the bustling artistic mosaic of LA, the group applies dazzling creativity and limitless excitement to their performances. Ardent and unapologetic interpretation of the old masters and probing collaboration with contemporary composers combine to create the ensemble's distinct and personal voice.

Delirium Musicum's fifteen members hail from twelve countries and four continents. Together, the ensemble reflects an enriched, eclectic group identity – replete with cultural, social, and ethnic diversity – that represents the youth and vitality of the next generation of artistic excellence and musical leadership in Los Angeles and beyond. Led by violist and artistic director Étienne Gara, their artistry, spontaneity, and their juxtaposition of music from across five centuries of repertoire combine to create a singularly exhilarating and meaningful experience for audiences.

About Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)

Located on the vibrant and diverse campus of California State University in the heart of Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley, The Soraya continues its vigorous commitment to innovating, excelling, and amplifying access by offering a wide variety of performances that reflect LA's many distinctive communities and featuring new and original work from the Los Angeles region as well as artists from around the world.

The Soraya's upcoming 2022-23 season offers a joy-filled reunion featuring a vibrant program of nearly 50 classical and popular music, dance, theater, family, and international events that will further establish it as one of the top arts companies in Southern California that uplifts and inspires

Listing for *Treelogy*

What: World Premiere Performance of *Treelogy*
Who: **Composed by Billy Childs, Steven Mackey, and Gabriella Smith**
Where: Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)
18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330.
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