

*TRACE JOHNSON*

An Album of Contemporary Solo Cello and 'Neo' Chamber Works

By

Trace Johnson

A written project submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

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My major professor in my second and third year of my doctorate, Parry Karp, has been a pillar in my life throughout this degree as well as in my formative years as a young cellist. I would not have been able to have made my album *TRACE JOHNSON* without Parry's relentless attention to detail and unending patience for me as a student. I am also grateful to Professor Emeritus of Cello, Uri Vardi, for his help with my cello playing during my first year in Madison.

My production team for the album consisted of Karl Lavine, principal cellist of the Madison Symphony Orchestra and Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra, Professor Parry Karp, and audio engineer, Ric Probst. My team brought years of experience to this project and made the recording process seamless and cohesive. I was also lucky to have such great friends and musicians as pianist, Hsin-I Huang and violinist, Sahada Buckley join me on the album; their artistic contributions found in *TRACE JOHNSON* speak for themselves. My team for the album was truly a 'dream team.'

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## ABSTRACT

The Doctoral Performance and Research submitted by Trace Johnson, under the direction of Parry Karp at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts consists of the following:

**I. Doctoral Research Project: Professional-quality recording titled 'TRACE JOHNSON'**

My Doctoral Research Project is a professional quality CD that will be released nationally and internationally by Albany Records in 2025. The recording is the culmination of years of preparation on my instrument and features music that encapsulates my musical persona as both a performer and musician. The timeline for the project has spanned across multiple years; in November 2020 I recorded the Schwendinger's *All the Pretty Little Horses* for a different Albany release at Oktaven Studios in Hoboken, New Jersey after recording the work earlier that year for the Madison New Music Festival's virtual season. In July 2023 I recorded the Samuel Barber and Guillaume Connesson works for cello and piano with my colleague Hsin-I Huang at University of Wisconsin-Madison. On January 5-7<sup>th</sup>, 2024 I recorded a new solo cello work from Pulitzer-Prize winning composer, Melinda Wagner, as well as the Erwin Schulhoff Duo for Violin and Cello with violinist, Sahada Buckley. Karl Lavine, principal cellist of the Madison Symphony Orchestra and my former cello teacher, was the producer; Milwaukee-based recording engineer, Ric Probst, was the recording engineer who edited and mastered the recordings. The music for the album is as follows:

Samuel Barber *Cello Sonata, Op. 6* (1932)

Hsin-I Huang, piano

I. *Allegro ma non troppo*

II. *Adagio; presto; adagio*

III. *Allegro appassionato*

Laura Schwendinger *All the Pretty Little Horses* (2018) for Unaccompanied Cello

Erwin Schulhoff *Duo for Violin and Cello* (1925)

Sahada Buckley, violin

I. *Moderato*

II. *Zingaresca*

III. *Andantino*

IV. *Moderato*

Melinda Wagner *Limbic Notes* (2023) for Unaccompanied Cello (dedicated to Trace Johnson)

I. *Fidget*

II. *Hushing Song*

III. *Devilkin*

Guillaume Connesson *Les Chants de L'Agartha, "The Songs of Agartha"* (2008)

Hsin-I Huang, piano

I. *Sous le desert de Mongolie*

II. *La bibliothèque des savoirs perdus*

III. *Danse devant le roi du monde*

**II. Solo Recital / Sonata Recital 12.9.2021, Morphy Hall**

*Aubrie Jacobson, piano*

Oswaldo Golijov (b. 1960) *Omaramor* for Solo Cello (1991)

J.S. Bach *Unaccompanied Cello Suite No. 3 in C Major*

- I. *Prelude*
- II. *Allemande*
- III. *Courante*
- IV. *Sarabande*
- V. *Bourees 1 & 2*
- VI. *Gigue*

Edvard Grieg *Cello Sonata. Op. 36* (1883)

- I. *Allegro agitato*
- II. *Andante molto tranquillo*
- III. *Allegro molto e marcato*

**III. Solo Recital / Sonata Recital 3.3.2022, Collins Hall**

*Thomas Kasdorf, piano*

George Crumb *Sonata for Solo Cello* (1955)

- I. *Fantasia*
- II. *Tema pastorale con variazioni*
- III. *Toccata*

Rebecca Clarke *Sonata for Viola, arr. Violoncello* (1919)

- I. *Impetuoso*
- II. *Vivace*
- III. *Adagio*

Serge Rachmaninoff *Cello Sonata, Op. 19* (1901)

- I. *Lento, allegro moderato*
- II. *Allegro scherzando*
- III. *Andante*
- IV. *Allegro mosso*

**IV. Chamber Recital, (Non-Strings) 5.12.2022, Collins Hall**

*Will Preston, piano / Gretchen Hill, clarinet*

Joel Hoffman (b. 1953) *Ei, Jauga Jauga* (2017)

- I. *Osei pati, martala*
- II. *Motula mano, sirdela*
- III. *Isojoja joja, sodauto*
- IV. *Ei, Jauga Jauga*

Johannes Brahms *Clarinet Trio in A Minor, Op. 114* (1891)

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Adagio*
- III. *Andante grazioso*
- IV. *Allegro*

Jody Rockmaker (b. 1961) *Klezmer-clysmic for Clarinet, Cello and Piano* (2018)

V. **Chamber Recital (Strings), 4.23.23, Collins Hall**

*Sahada Buckley, violin / Kayla Patrick, viola / Madlen Breckbill, viola / Kaleigh Acord, violin / Will Preston, piano*

Paul Wiancko (b. 1983) *American Haiku for Viola and Cello* (2014)

Caroline Shaw (b. 1982) *Limestone & Felt for Viola and Cello* (2012)

Erwin Schulhoff *Duo for Violin and Cello* (1925)

- I. *Moderato*
- II. *Zingaresca*
- III. *Andantino*
- IV. *Moderato*

Ludwig Beethoven *String Trio No. 1, Op. 9 in G Major* (1798)

- I. *Adagio-Allegro con brio*
- II. *Adagio ma non tanto e cantabile*
- III. *Scherzo allegro*
- IV. *Presto*

Guillaume Connesson (b. 1960) *Les Chants de L'Agartha* (2008)

- I. *Sous le desert de Mongolie*
- II. *La bibliothèque des savoirs perdus*
- III. *Danse devant le roi du monde*

VI. **Lecture recital – Electroacoustic Demonstration & Solo Performance, (3.19.2024, WYSO Building)**

*My lecture recital consisted of two contemporary solo cello performances on the first half and two electroacoustic performances on the second half. In the first half, I briefly lectured on Laura Schwendinger's All the Pretty Little Horses and Melinda Wagner's Limbic Notes for solo cello and performed both works. On the second half, I performed Jonathan Harvey's Ricercare Una Melodia with my electroacoustic rig and presented the state of my research through an explanation of the key components of my setup and the Ableton Live project file I created for the piece.*

VII. **Final Recital, (5.5.2024, Collins Hall)**

*Sahada Buckley, violin / Will Preston, piano*

Claude Debussy *Cello Sonata L. 135* (1915)

- I. *Prologue: lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto*
- II. *Sérénade: modérément animé*
- III. *Finale: animé, léger et nerveux*

Maurice Ravel *Sonata for Violin and Cello* (1922)

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Très vif*
- III. *Lent*
- IV. *Vif, avec entrain*

Francis Poulenc *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano* (1948)

- I. *Allegro – Tempo di Marcia*
- II. *Cavatine*
- III. *Ballabile*
- IV. *Finale*

## Preface

My intention behind this document is to share my unique experience with this recording project, examine the process I took to complete the album, and to accompany the music found on *TRACE JOHNSON*. Readers may access the mastered audio recordings in the google drive folder, 'Trace Johnson DMA Research Project Recordings 3.15.24', and requesting access from [traceljohnson@gmail.com](mailto:traceljohnson@gmail.com). I have re-formatted the recordings to .MP4 instead of the large .WAV file format the recordings were originally mastered in. I reformatted them to make playing the files easier for readers' electronic devices. Upon my graduation from the University, my complete materials for this project will be available at the University of Wisconsin Mill's Music Library. This album is the intellectual property of Trace Johnson and Albany Records and is projected to be available for purchase via Apple Music or streamed via Spotify in early 2025.

## I. Music Selection

### Chamber Works

In my career as a musician, I have recorded both in professional recording studios and from home with my own equipment. From these experiences, I have gained a profound respect for the work audio professionals do for performing artists. In the initial planning stages for this project I realized that I would need help from an audio professional, or two, and that it would be a significant financial investment to do so. I also knew that a big investment of time would be required on my part preparing the music. Considering these commitments, the music selection needed to be done with sensitivity and intention. In retrospect, it seems as though the music for this project chose me rather than me doing the choosing. Sometimes when one learns a new piece, it goes on the shelf until you are asked to play it again. With this selection of works, I found myself finding and looking for ways to perform these works again and again. I've grown so much from learning each one of the compositions from my album and each have their own unique histories and idiosyncrasies with me as performer.

As seasoned musicians know, having a long performance history with a piece of music often affords that musician the most insight in the music. In some cases, I selected pieces that I had history with, like Barber's cello sonata for example. My top priority for selecting music for the album was to choose works that would represent me well, show off my strengths as a player, and, most importantly, be music I believed in. I have noticed that the compositions on my album make convincing cases for narrative. The musical stories found in the music from my album are bold and extroverted in character. It is easy to imagine that they are depicted in bright, primary colors rather than in pastel, or black and white. While the works on my album are not necessarily musically linear, it is easy to imagine the story each piece presents to the listener. I surprised myself with this project; I truly had no idea how much more I would learn about these works that I thought I already knew so well. The process of recording *TRACE JOHNSON* has re-illuminated my imagination, and after many humbling hours of listening to all the takes, I can confidently say that I have gained new ideas for furthering my playing as a cellist, musician, and artist.

Samuel Barber's Cello Sonata is a work that I have been performing for more than ten years. I first began studying it when I was an undergraduate student at the Cleveland Institute of Music, then as a master's student at Lynn Conservatory, and returned to once more as a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. David Cole, my cello professor at Lynn Conservatory, had a direct connection to the work and it was fortuitous that I was able to



study the sonata with him. When they were both students at Curtis, Orlando Cole, long-time cello professor at Curtis Institute and David's father, my teacher at Lynn, worked with Samuel Barber to help flesh out the piece and performed many of the early performances of the work with Samuel Barber at the piano. There is a live recording on YouTube of Orlando Cole speaking about his involvement with Barber during their formative student years and a performance of the work as well with pianist Vladimir Sokoloff.<sup>2</sup> David Cole taught me so much about the sonata and shared with me some of the historical markings, articulations, and fingerings that were used to perform the piece from the era it was composed and premiered. My history with the piece and unique connection to the sonata through David Cole led me to make the decision to include the piece on my record. During COVID Summer 2020, I also was fortunate to have had the opportunity to play a portion of the sonata with Hsin-I Huang, my pianist for the CD, for a virtual session with cellist Gary Hoffman in New York City through the Joseph Gingold summer music festival. Gary Hoffman, who was a thoughtful and articulate teacher in our brief session, gave me some invaluable insight into pacing the vibrato's intensity within the context of the musical line. Selecting the Barber sonata for the album was also a result of the shared experience Hsin-I and I had performing the sonata in 2020 for Gary Hoffman.

The Erwin Schulhoff Duo for Violin and Cello was a piece I had been hearing about for many years from the great violinist, Carmit Zori, at Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society gatherings in Madison, WI. There is a lot to like about the duo; it is a virtuosic, beautiful, and somewhat unknown work in four movements. The musical language of the duo contrasts with all the other pieces for the CD; Schulhoff's penchant for combining musical genres mixed with his use of atonal Second Viennese School writing style make for a potent blend. Although the Second Viennese School of composition has never been music that I actively sought out, I have enjoyed its influence on composers like Erwin Schulhoff. The fact that that this under-programmed duo is truly a masterwork, with equally virtuosic writing featured in both the cello and violin voices, made it a great candidate for the album. Lastly, recording the Schulhoff with Sahada Buckley was an easy decision to make for the album's roster of pieces because we had already been performing it regularly in the eighteen months leading up to the recording.

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<sup>2</sup> "Barber's 'Sonata for Violoncello & Piano' - Live." *YouTube*, 4 Sept. 2016, [youtu.be/6p6lBc84Liw?si=6-RBbcOjCFBRetxt](https://youtu.be/6p6lBc84Liw?si=6-RBbcOjCFBRetxt).

I first learned about Guillaume Connesson's *Les Chants de L'Agartha*, in 2022 when I attended a recital my professor Parry Karp performed with pianist Eli Kalman, piano professor at UW-Oshkosh. The piece reminded me so much of *Pohadka - "Fairy Tale"* by Leos Janacek in that each movement feels as though it were taking place 'once upon a time in a distant land.' The work depicts a fantasy story about a fictional place, the lost underground city of *Agartha*. The writing is convincing and simply irresistible. Tremendous melodies in the first two movements and a devilishly virtuosic finale movement earned it a spot on the album. I began learning the piece in Spring 2023, performed it several times with pianist Will Preston in Madison, Wisconsin both on campus at UW-Madison and off campus at the Arts and Literature Laboratory and Capitol Lakes Recital Hall, and then again with Hsin-I in the same spaces in Madison in July 2023 prior to the July 2023 recording session.

### **Contemporary Solo Cello Works**

Contemporary classical and avant-garde music have always been musical genres that I have had kinship with and I knew from the onset of the project that I wanted to champion some contemporary solo cello works. The complex musical languages that contemporary composers write in are empowered and enhanced by extended techniques, a diverse range of writing styles, and modern technology. Similar to contemporary visual artists who operate in the world utilizing modern technology to create their works, contemporary composers create music that reflects our modern world with more resources than ever before. Composers, like Laura Schwendinger and Melinda Wagner, write in musical languages that often blend and draw from different musical genres, identities, and cultures that are relevant to the diverse communities they serve. Contemporary music is truly the beating heart of classical music and composition; it is pointing the way forward for classical music itself.

*All the Pretty Little Horses* and *Limbic Notes* found me through professional engagements with the Madison New Music Festival and Atlantic Music Festival. During COVID, I was asked to participate in MNMF's virtual series and Artistic Director and clarinetist, Kristina Teuschler, (who I went to middle school with in Madison, WI), asked me to record the piece and submit it for their annual summer concert season. After my performance of *All the Pretty Little Horses* was released virtually, University of Wisconsin-Madison Professor of Composition, Laura Schwendinger, reached out to me and asked me to record the work for an upcoming Albany Release of her own. Later that year in November 2020 I completed the recording at Oktaven Audio in Hoboken, New Jersey with head recording engineer

Ryan Streber. I felt that my recording of *All the Pretty Little Horses* was at the same level as the other recordings I made for the album, so it made sense for me to include it and it also helped me to cut down on costs as well.

In Summer 2022, when I was a Contemporary Ensemble fellow at the Atlantic Music Festival in Waterville, Maine, I was selected to perform an unfinished movement of Pulitzer-Prize winning composer Melinda Wagner's new unaccompanied cello work, *Hushing Song*, the middle movement of the set of three movements now titled, *Limbic Notes*. I worked with the composer in preparation for the premier of the work and she spoke with me about the goals for the piece. During that week I had the privilege to perform the work in preparation for the concert for the former principal cellist of the New York Philharmonic, Alan Stepansky, who gave me insight into my playing of *Hushing Song* and premiering new music. After my performance, Melinda decided to finish the piece and she sent me drafts for the remaining movements in the following winter season. Melinda completed *Limbic Notes* in Spring of 2023 and my recording of *Limbic Notes* will be the first recording of the new piece for solo cello.

## II. Collaborating with Composers, Laura Schwendinger & Melinda Wagner

### All the Pretty Little Horses

Most contemporary pieces bring their own specific challenges to the composer and performer which require flexibility and creative problem solving on behalf of both parties. For the composer, employing a comprehensive knowledge of the instruments involved with a new piece can be a significant obstacle to face; in September 2020, Laura Schwendinger reached out to me after we had initiated our work on the recording project of *All the Pretty Little Horses* to ask about the viability of some of her cello-writing for an upcoming solo cello work commissioned for cello soloist, Matthew Haimovitz. Some of Laura's questions pertained to the harmonic series on the cello, where harmonic fingerings would or would not be possible, and where harmonics or false harmonics fall can be mapped onto the fingerboard in reference to trilling. Although her questions did not pertain to *ATPLH*, they gave me access into the process composers undertake when composing contemporary music for solo instruments and, ultimately, her questions informed my performance of her piece in my recording for Albany. In some cases, I changed fingerings and bowings to *All the Pretty Little Horse* to get closer to my artistic vision for the piece; for example, in measure 3 of *ATPLH*, (see *Figure 1*, below) the B $\flat$  found at the end of the measure is not indicated to occur on any particular string and no bowings are marked in the score, only slurs.



*Figure 1*, ms. 1-6 of *All the Pretty Little Horses* by Laura Schwendinger, from Appendix 1<sup>3</sup>

Laura's questions about substitution fingerings had given me some new ideas for how I wanted to shape the fragile opening of the work; when I initially began working on the piece, I listened to a recording of the Joan Baez version

<sup>3</sup> Schwendinger, Laura. "All the Pretty Little Horses." 2018. Keiser Classical (BMI), 2018.

of the song *ATPLH* is based off as well as many others. Prior to my initial Madison New Music Festival home recording, I was not in touch with Laura about the work so it was extremely important to immerse myself in any materials I could find about the piece to get closer to the music itself. I learned that *All the Pretty Little Horses* is an American folksong lullaby dating back to the 1800's from both African American and white sources.<sup>4</sup> The original lyrics of the song tell the story of a presumably African American mother crooning to sleep a baby that is not her own while leaving her own baby with someone else. This sentiment is quite visceral and heart-breaking, and Laura speaks to this quality of the original source material right at the onset of the piece. Decoding the intention behind the music is at the heart of the work the performer undertakes when learning a new contemporary piece and, after listening to some historical recordings and becoming aware of the history of the original source material, I felt closer to my envisioned sound for the opening of the piece. I wanted to capture a melancholic vocal sound, so I took it upon myself, with Laura's ideas for substitutions in mind as well as the sound of the vocal recordings I had been listening to, to re-imagine the technical plan required to play the opening measures. After several a few weeks of working on the piece and decoding some of the rhythmic language, I landed on this version of the first four bars of music:



Figure 2, Annotated ms. 1-6 of *All the Pretty Little Horses* by Laura Schwendinger, from Appendix 2<sup>5</sup>

The changes I made to Laura's score were based on the desire to mimic the phrasing of a vocalist and, in a larger sense, the changes I made allowed me to envision Laura's musical idea more effectively on the cello. Although

<sup>4</sup> "Bluegrass Messengers." *Bluegrass Messengers - All The Pretty Little Horses- Shirley Lomax Mansel*, [www.bluegrassmessengers.com/all-the-pretty-little-horses--shirley-lomax-mansell-.aspx](http://www.bluegrassmessengers.com/all-the-pretty-little-horses--shirley-lomax-mansell-.aspx). Accessed 2 March, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Schwendinger, Laura. "All the Pretty Little Horses." 2018. Keiser Classical (BMI), 2018.

it is not marked in the score, or likely in the early sheet music for the song, when you sing the lullaby, the inflection on the first note takes precedence over the note a fifth up following it. When playing a bowed instrument achieving a diminuendo on a down-bow is an accepted practice and in the opening interval of the *ATPLH*, it made sense to employ that practice to achieve the unmarked diminuendo up to the top note. Conversely, in ms. 2, the upbow is used to crescendo into the *mf* found in the middle of the measure; achieving crescendos with an upbow is an accepted practice in string playing as well. The second diminuendo of the piece, which is marked, is at the end of the second bar and is a more significant dynamic than the natural crescendo within the opening 5<sup>th</sup> interval of the melody, the first two notes of the piece. The diminuendo at the end of ms. 2 goes from *mf* to *mp*, occurs in a cadential area nearly 2/3 into the phrase, and takes place over nearly 3 sixteenth notes, which at the tempo of the piece, ♩= 46, is a significant amount of time. I felt that this diminuendo, and the high B-flat at the end of it, needed special attention and sound so I began practicing the shift occurring on one string rather than two. The D-string shift on one string afforded me an expressive slide, a chance for rubato, and special vibrato on the top note. What I also liked about the shift taking place on one string rather than two was that it mimicked the sound of the opening interval which also occurs on one string. The same vocal sound was able to be matched across the entire phrase. Lastly, the descending scale in ms. 4 taking place entirely on one string because of the D-string shift to B<sup>b</sup> was closer to the articulation of those notes found in sung versions of the lullaby. By immersing myself in the origins of the source material for *ATPLH* and engaging with the composer on her compositional process when writing for the cello, I was afforded insight on how to move forward and flesh out my interpretation for the Albany recording.

Communicating with a composer is an important piece of working collaboratively; without effective communication, the musical decisions made by the performer may not accurately convey the goals of the composer. When I spoke with Laura about *ATPLH* in preparation for my Albany recording session, there were some questions that I had about certain musical instances found in the work that I hadn't been able to answer in my first performance of the piece. For example, in an email I wrote to Laura in July 2020 after MNMF, I asked her, "What was your idea or inspiration for the sul ponticello sections [of *ATPLH*]", to which she replied, "those ponticello sections are the moments as the child (me) falls asleep but being afraid of the dark and sleeping in a room alone."<sup>6</sup> Understanding the

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<sup>6</sup> Schwendinger, Laura. "Question about Sul Pont." Email received by Trace Johnson. 13 July, 2020.

intention behind the writing in a contemporary work is important; Laura's answer to me about the sul ponticello sections of *ATPLH* informed the direction I took those sections in my Albany recording.

### **Limbic Notes**

Happily, I was afforded time in person with Melinda Wagner in preparation for the premiere of *II. Hushing Song* at the Atlantic Music Festival where we met. However, I was not able to work with her in person for *I. Fidget* or *III. Devilkin*, the two new movements of the piece. Extra responsibility falls onto the performer to 'get it right the first time' when performing a new piece and when no previous recording of the work exists; for *I. Fidget* and *III. Devilkin*, I could not truly hear the piece until I began recording it on my own. The process of recording the two movements from home helped me to prepare for the upcoming professional recording session; it also helped Melinda because she was able to hear the piece and determine what edits needed to be made. The initial recordings I made were not live nor had we collaborated on them in-person; instead of doing run-throughs of the piece as someone normally would do for live performance, I decided to select takes for each movement and practice recording them individually to mimic the feeling of a recording session and to save time. By recording and patching takes together rather than recording full-runs, I was better able to analyze the piece's form and get a sense of pacing both in the piece and pacing physically for my body. Recording takes and feeling the toll of successive takes helped me to physically prepare for the three-day session in January 2024 as well. Viewing the edits that Melinda made to the new movements in *Limbic Notes* gave me insight into how to perform the piece and what the composer was looking for in my playing. After I had sent her my draft recordings of the outer movements, she sent me an email with some changes for both movements. In the draft version of *I. Fidget*, Melinda had written a longer, drawn out opening that contained some expressive tempo indications. While the opening looked to be relatively stable rhythmically, there were moments where the tempo would deviate from the fast pulse and 'fidget' away from the main pulse, (see *Figure 3* on the next page):

for Trace Johnson

**Limbic Notes**

for solo Cello

Duration: c. ????

**I. Fidget**

MELINDA WAGNER

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 80$   
(ord.) ----- m.s.p. ----- ord.

*pp* *sfz* *p* *sfz* *sfzpp* *poco rit.* *sfzmf*

**a tempo**  
*p* *a bit insect-like*

**slower, heavily**

**a tempo (as before)**  
*sfz*

Figure 3, ms. 1-12 Melinda Wagner *Limbic Notes I. Fidget Draft*, from Appendix 3<sup>7</sup>

The ‘fidgety’ quality of the original draft version was created by the variety of tempi present in the opening, (see Figure 3 above). The opening measures, which end with a *rit.* in ms. 4, and the ‘slower, heavily’ measure at the end of the third system suggested changes in pulse. In my draft recordings, I paid extra close attention to making contrasts in what I had perceived to be deliberate departures from the rhythmic, ‘insect-like’ material found in the sixteenths. For the final version, Melinda removed the first two bars of tremolo as well as the ‘slower, heavily’ bar at the end of the third system of music. By removing these measures, the rhythm in the opening became essentially one relatively fast pulse. The removal of those measures, (see Figure 4 on the next page), told me that Melinda was looking for one main pulse in the opening, and that was what I went with for the recording.

<sup>7</sup> Wagner, Melinda. “Limbic Notes.” 2023. Unpublished.



Duration: c. ????

for solo Cello

I. Fidget

MELINDA WAGNER

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 80$

*sfzpp* *poco rit.* *sfzmf*

*a tempo* *a bit insect-like* *p*

*pp* *MOLTO CRESC.*

*a tempo (as before)* *sfz p*

Figure 4, Annotated ms. 1-12 Melinda Wagner *Limbic Notes I. Fidget*, from Appendix 4<sup>8</sup>

While some of the changes were quite direct like those in the opening of *I. Fidget*, others were more ambiguous and required that I take some initiative in determining what type of sound, or effect, was appropriate in consideration to the notation. Ms. 82 and 76 of *III. Devilkin*, (see Figure 5 and 6), feature some extended techniques that requested clarity from Melinda about; in the end, these measures also ended up being ones that I made certain individual musical decisions for:

**Tantrum!** arco; slide hand position up → s.p.

76 *ff*

*pizz., jazzy* II

ord. *mp sub., intense*

Figure 5, ms. 76-77 Melinda Wagner *Limbic Notes III. Devilkin*, from Appendix 5<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Wagner, Melinda. "Limbic Notes." 2023. Unpublished.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Figure 6, ms. 82-84 Melinda Wagner *Limbic Notes III. Devilkin*, from Appendix 6<sup>10</sup>

My initial reading of ms. 76, (Figure 5 on the previous page), suggested to me that each new hand shape sliding up the fingerboard would occur one half-step above the last, sequentially, until reaching the final hand shape with G in the top note. Rhythmically, this would cause the bar to be in 5/4, not 4/4, because there are five half-steps between D and G and each grouping takes place over one quarter note beat within the measure. For the recording I had to decide how close to the pitches I was going to play. In the end, I think I ascended approximately 1.25 half-steps for each new hand shape to reach G in the final beat of ms. 76. Melinda later clarified with me later that she was not particularly interested in any pitches being accurate in measures 76 and 83 of the third movement.

Like ms. 76, when I was putting my draft recordings together to send to Melinda, I had to decide what pitches to select for ms. 83, (see Figure 6). To reach an F $\sharp$  in the final note of ms. 84, it meant that I needed to decide what pitches would take place in beats two and three of ms. 83, which is not marked. Based on the pitch values found in ms. 83, C - B - G - E $\flat$ , and the assumption that the second beat of ms. 83 is already higher in pitch than the previous beat, the decision I was faced with was to either ascend by three third tones (.33 of a whole step) in each beat or ascend by two quarter tones (.25 of a whole step) plus one half-step to reach F $\sharp$  in ms. 84. After Melinda heard my draft recording, she relayed to me that the pitch values were not the priority for the figure and that the F $\sharp$  was not even that important of a pitch to land on at the end of the bar. In my recording, Melinda suggested that I just fly up the fingerboard with no target pitch in mind for the end of ms. 84. My takeaway from the experience of putting together *Limbic Notes* remotely with Melinda and preparing the music for recording was that I perhaps placed too much importance on the draft recordings I made of the piece early on. I spent time learning music that ended up being

<sup>10</sup> Wagner, Melinda. "Limbic Notes." 2023. Unpublished.

removed or changed, like ms. 10 of *I. Fidget* and ms. 82-84 of *III. Devilkin*; it would have served me better to have sent a less technically accurate version early in the learning process rather than spending time to learn, in some cases, very difficult music that ultimately was not included in the score. For example, ms. 10 of the draft score for *I. Fidget* took many weeks to be able to play accurately and in tune and it ended up being omitted from the final version. I suppose the silver-lining was that the changes that did end up being made to *Limbic Notes* helped me to further understand the goals of the piece that Melinda had; the changes brought me closer to the work. In any case, for future projects I expect I will take less time to put draft recordings together to save time in the learning process.

### III. Project Planning

#### Albany Record Label & Contract

At the onset of this project, it was unclear to me whether I would have my album released at an established recording label or not. It is a costly affair to record a CD and the decision to have it promoted by a reputable label is one that adds thousands of dollars to the budget. Ultimately, it made sense for me to go with Albany, not just because of their reputation as a classical label but also because of some of the benefits they offered upfront. Before signing the contract at Albany I was in touch with Susan Bush, President of Albany Records, for several months to understand the language and terms within the agreement:

1. “Albany will manufacture the album *TRACE JOHNSON* in compact disc format with an initial pressing of 500 copies with repressing as needed; they will also advertise, promote, and distribute the recording for the national and international market and send at least 100 copies to media/radio play”.<sup>11</sup> Initially, 500 copies seemed like an unnecessary amount of copies however I came to the realization that with the leftover 400 copies, the label can make additional copies made available to me, or other music distributing outlets, over a long period of time.
2. Albany states that the costs for the preparation, production, and printing of the disc, booklet and tray card, will not exceed \$4,500.<sup>12</sup> I wrote to the label to see if it would be possible for me to lower costs by preparing the booklet and tray card on my own and printing them via a third-party company, like Sooper Dooper in Madison, Wisconsin. After a bit of research, it was clear that for 500 copies, doing a custom order on CD labels and six-page booklets was not going to save me any money. Going through Albany for these services streamlined the production process for the album and I expect that the cost of Albany doing these services in-house saved me a significant amount of time.
3. In the contract, Albany states that they will be responsible for applying for the correct mechanical licenses for all the works on the album; considering that most of my album is contemporary and not within public domain, it was very helpful to not have to worry about applying for the appropriate mechanical licenses after the release of my album.

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<sup>11</sup> Albany Agreement, p. 2, WARRANTIES OF THE COMPANY, 3.5. Accessed 2 March, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> Albany Agreement, p. 1, WARRANTIES OF THE ARTIST, 2.3. Accessed 2 March, 2024.

### Budget

When I began planning this project, I estimated close to what I was invoiced for piano tunings, hall rentals, Karl Lavine’s producer fee, Ric Probst’ recording engineer fee, and Albany’s \$4,500. I also expected that I would have a lot of hours of editing that I would incur a fee to Ric for, but it was unclear to me initially how many hours would be necessary to complete the CD. It was only until after the recording sessions were over that I began to get an idea of the amount of editing we might have to do. In the end, the amount of time it took was considerable; one of the other ‘costs’ I did not consider was the amount of time and energy it would take to schedule trips and travel to and from Milwaukee to edit. After the recording sessions had taken place the costs for editing and gas to and from Milwaukee to edit with the engineer needed to be recalculated. The table below provides the initial fees I expected to face along with estimates of final costs to produce the album; the difference between the two rates for editing was a result of doing the first six hours of editing at NŌ Studios in Milwaukee vs. Ric’s home studio in Port Washington, Wisconsin:

	Projected Costs
Piano Tuning (2x)	\$320
Collins Hall Rentals 2x (24hr x 15\$/hr)	\$495
Engineer fee Session 1 (2 x \$400/day)	\$844
Engineer fee Session 2 (3 x \$400/day)	\$1244 (estimate)
Editing/Mastering with Engineer	6hr x \$65/hr = \$390 + 19hr x \$40/hr = \$760 \$1,150 (estimate)
Gas to and from Milwaukee for editing	\$200
Producer fee	\$1000 (estimate)
Albany’s fee	\$4,500
	Total: \$8,853 (estimate)

As of January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, I had already personally paid for the piano tunings, Collins Hall rentals, and Ric’s fee for the July 2023 recording session for a total of \$1,859. I was able to save money by collaborating with friends instead of hiring the musicians for the project; Hsin-I and Sahada both agreed to be on the album for free. Because

Hsin-I had to fly into Madison from London, I booked several recitals with our recording program prior to the session to cover his travel costs to and from the July recording session. I also was also able to save money in the project by being prepared; the first session ended up being only two days. Also, I was able to reduce editing time by arriving to each editing session with completed take lists prepared and ready to go.

I will be accountable for paying the estimated remaining seven thousand dollars to various parties involved in the project in Summer 2024. I will borrow money from a private benefactor for this to pay the outstanding fees incurred by the project when I am invoiced after March 15th. In the upcoming year, to repay the money given to me for the project, I am planning a series of album release concerts to raise some of the money back for the project. In conjunction with the series, I will create a virtual fundraising campaign to help raise the seven-thousand remaining dollars for the project.

### **Performance Preparation**

Recording the works for the CD meant that the preparation and planning going into the recording sessions needed to be handled with extra care and intention. To prepare for recording I scheduled performances of the works to be recorded prior to the sessions themselves; those concerts gave us a chance to unify rhythms, pacing, and musical ideas before heading into recording. Prior to the July session, Hsin-I and I had performed the Barber Sonata and Connesson *Les Chants de L'Agartha* several times at the Arts + Literature Laboratory and Capitol Lakes venues in downtown Madison. I had performed Limbic Notes extensively on my own leading up the second session; I recorded the piece into my computer several times, made several drafts, and performed it live for UW-Madison string faculty in a performance jury three weeks before recording. Schulhoff had multiple virtual performances for audiences in hospitals, hospice, and nursing homes prior to the second session via Project Music Heals Us, a virtual classical outreach organization. Sahada and I had also been performing the Schulhoff for audiences in Alabama, Washington D.C., Maine, and Wisconsin in the eighteen months prior to the second session. Learning the music for the album in advance, having performance history with the pieces, and having recent performances leading up to the recording sessions were fruitful and necessary components of musical preparation that led to the musical success of the album.

#### IV. Recording Procedures: Selecting and Recording Takes, Editing, Closing Thoughts

Before recording anything, I was in touch with recording engineer, Ric Probst, to give him information about the space we would be recording in, Collins Hall on the UW-Madison campus. In a written document that Ric emailed to me for the purposes of this doctoral project, he wrote that, “his goal [for our recording sessions] would be to control as much of the space acoustics as possible.”<sup>13</sup> I received help from a few different UW-Madison SoM-Facilities staff members to deaden Collins Hall by fully lowering all of the adjustable acoustic panels at the start of each recording session; after the panels had been set, Ric set up ambience-microphones out in the hall and positioned additional microphones on stage. No signal processing was done during the recording process; the sounds for the album were taken directly from the microphones themselves.

Deciding on the sequential musical fragments, or takes, to be recorded for each composition before the recording sessions was an important task; organizing each section of music to be recorded in advance of the session allowed us to have a streamlined, organized recording process. By having the takes selected in advance, Parry and Karl, the producers for the album, were able to strategically pace the flow of both sessions and determine what to record and how to record it. Before both recording sessions, I created take recording-order lists and sent them over to Karl to review and make changes as necessary. This preparation work saved us time in the recording sessions because we had a plan for how to record each work. Here is an example of a take-recording-order list I prepared for the Schulhoff Duo’s fourth movement prior to the January 2024 recording session; this list is similar to lists I made for the other recorded works on the album:

Mut. 4  
 ms. 1 - 8 3rd beat  
 ms. 8 4th beat - 13  
 ms. 14  
 ms. 15  
 ms. 16 - downbeat of 24  
 ms. 24 2nd beat - m. 39 4th 3rd beat  
 ms. 39 4th beat - 41  
 ms. 42 - 54  
 ms. 55 - 56 2nd beat  
 ms. 56 3rd beat - 60  
 ms. 61 - 75  
 ms. 76 - 85 fermata  
 ms. 85 3rd beat - end - possible splices in first passage

Figure 7. Take-Recording Order for Schulhoff Duo, IV. Moderato

<sup>13</sup> Probst, Ric. “Technical Notes for *TRACE JOHNSON* Recording.” Email to Trace Johnson. February 1, 2024.

For the July 2023 session, I tried to select takes that allowed for clean breaks in both the cello and piano voices. Sometimes we adjusted some of the takes by isolating small sections within the take to get a ‘take of a take’ or by expanding outwardly from the take to record a larger section. In certain cases, recording larger sections made the most sense because it allowed us to get the musical flow and pacing cohesive across dynamic sections of music where tempo was fluctuating. One of the practices we adhered to was initiating the recording of a take in music leading up to the take we wanted; we did this to maintain organic ambience from the room inside the recording prior to the take starting for our edit. We rarely recorded a take right on top of a splice because beginning recording directly on a take is difficult to edit with because there is no ambience from the previous take inside the take for the edit. Also, we usually recorded a few measures past the end of each take to get timing for putting the edit together. Having ‘timing’ after a take finished allowed for the edit to have a more cohesive feeling throughout the recording and it also helped us retain ambience across multiple takes within the edit. Maintaining ambience was a priority in the edit and we tried to reflect that priority in our selection of takes for the album.

After both recording sessions had taken place, selecting takes and putting the edits together became the next job to complete. The first step was to listen to all the takes from the recording sessions and mark which takes I was selecting in both the physical scores and in the take sheet lists I received from the recording engineer. The take sheets from the engineer identified the measures of music for any group of takes as well as the corresponding take numbers to the left. Notes on a take in the take list from the audio engineer would also sometimes have check marks, (✓), for especially well-played takes or ‘FS’ to indicate false starts within a take. Here is an example of a take list sent from the audio engineer and a page of my annotated score for Schulhoff Duo, IV. Moderato:

The image displays two pages of handwritten musical notation and take lists for Schulhoff Duo, IV. Moderato. The left page shows musical staves with handwritten annotations such as "with pings", "look 2 bars", "TOP-8", "MFS", and "DAY 2". The right page shows a take list with measure numbers (236-246) and checkmarks.

Measure	Notes	Checkmark
236	4-13 (cont)	✓
237	↓	
238	↓	✓
239	↓	
240	↓	✓✓
241	↓ MFS	
242	↓ good early	
243	12-13	✓
244	↓	
245	↓	
246	↓	✓✓

Figure 8, Ric Probst Take Lists for Schulhoff Duo, IV. Moderato



The image shows a handwritten musical score for Schulhoff's IV. Moderato. The score is written on two staves. The top staff has handwritten take numbers 243, 249, 246, 250, 251, and 258. The bottom staff has handwritten take numbers 260 and 261. The score includes performance instructions such as "Allegro deciso (w.)", "sul G", "ff subito pesante molto", and "poco a poco allargando e diminuendo." There are also some handwritten annotations like "260:31" and "261:31" with arrows pointing to specific measures.

Figure 9, Schulhoff, IV. Moderato Score with Take Markings

By mapping out the measures in the score with the names of the takes themselves, it gave me a visual aid of the edit beyond my edit sheet where the selected takes were written down in sequential order. In the above excerpt of the annotated Schulhoff score, I wrote in the take numbers for takes I considered selecting for particular sections of music. The take numbers are also accompanied by brackets that I placed into the score which helped me to delineate the amount of music used for a given take. My job for selecting takes in preparation to working with the engineer was to write down in sequential order the takes I wanted to use, and the timings for the music I wanted within the takes. For my own sanity, I included the measure numbers of the music in each take on my edit sheet so that I could map out the order of the takes in the score itself. The intentional listening one does to select takes for a CD cannot be rushed and I spent many hours selecting takes. *Figure 10* on the following page depicts the take selection list I created for Schulhoff Duo, IV. Moderato; this take selection list is similar to those I made for the other recorded works on the album:

Schulhoff mvt. 4

ms. 1-8	Take 231	0:08-0:38	take 30 :20-21 ms 4 beat 2-3
ms. 9-11	Take 240	0:03-0:14	take 229 0:17-48 ms. 4 beat 2-3
ms. 12-13	Take 245	0:05-0:10	or Take 246 0:06-0:11
ms. 14	Take 250	0:03-0:07	(chords in previous 2 takes <sup>24</sup> <sub>24</sub> good!)
ms. 15	Take 258	0:01-0:05	
ms. 16	Take 262	0:27-0:30	
ms. 17	Take 265	0:19-0:23	
ms. 18 1st beat	Take 265	0:55-0:56	take 262 :32
ms. 18 beat 2 - beat 1 ms. 19	Take 266	0:53-0:56	take 260-261 :35
ms. 19 beat 2 - ms. 20 beat 2	Take 260	0:31-0:35	or 1:04-1:07
ms. 20 beat 3-24	Take 269	0:04-0:22	
ms. 25-31	Take 273	0:04-0:30	Trace wants alternate takes of beginning
ms. 32-41	Take 278	0:26-	MS 48 take 280 0:48-52
ms. 40-41	Take 280	0:15-28	
ms. 42 - ms. 48	Take 288	0:09-0:31	ms 48-49 bt 2 take 288
ms. 49 beat 3 - 55 6 beat	Take 289	0:02-19	:47-52
ms. 55 beat 3 - 56 Beat 2	Take 292	0:04/5-0:07	
ms. 56 Beat 3 - 57 beat 3	Take 293	1:38-1:42	
ms. 57 Beat 4 - 60	Take 294	0:38-0:48	

  

ms 32 - ms 35 bt 2 take ~~277~~ :27 - :39

\* ms. 35 bt 2 - ms 38 bt 4 = take 278 :38 - :47

ms 38 bt 4 - ms 40 take 280 :48 - :50 should we take bts 2+3 from ms 38 maybe whole thing

Figure 10, Take Selection Sheet for Schulhoff Duo, IV. Moderato with Timings

After the July 2023 session it was clearer where to improve in the second session. Throughout the January 2024 session, Sahada and I listened to the recorded takes of Schulhoff each day to determine what we needed for the third day, which we ended up taking advantage of. We improved the pacing throughout the second session as well; for example, on the second day of the January 2024 session, we decided to begin recording the third movement of Wagner after I had already recorded the fourth movement of Schulhoff in the morning and the first movement of the Wagner in the early afternoon. As we began recording *III. Devilkin*, I realized that I was too exhausted for it to be an efficient use of our limited time, so we switched to the middle movement of the Wagner, which was slow, legato, and the most comfortable movement of the entire session for me to record. That decision saved us time and energy and it also

afforded me as much time as I needed on the third and final day of the January 2024 recording session to record the hardest movement of the three, *Devilkin*, which also turned out to have the most edits of anything on the album.

In retrospect, it would have been helpful to have listened to all the takes from the July 2023 session while the recording was taking place. Although we finished a day early in the July 2023 session, both Hsin-I and I were physically and mentally exhausted. The July 2023 session occurred after two days of concerts with limited rehearsal time and then recording days were eight hours long a piece. Due to exhaustion, it did not occur to me to do re-takes from the previous two days on the third day, or that that could be a fruitful activity. For the July 2023 session, we had everything in the Barber covered at the end of the second day but, if I had done listening work that night, I would have thought to re-record some sections. Re-takes on day three of the second recording session would have ultimately made the edit easier to put together. For future recording sessions I will remember to listen to the takes of the recording session during the session itself to have a better idea about the work left in any remaining recording time.

## V. Album Booklet Materials

Per my contract with Albany, I was assigned the job of assembling materials to create the CD. In the following section, I have condensed the draft materials together which includes information for the booklet pages, selected album artwork, and liner notes for *TRACE JOHNSON*:

### *OUTER PANELS (1)*

[Album Cover]



Height: 4.63", Width 5.42" & 0.25



The Albany logo will be featured on the lower right corner of the album cover.

**OUTER PANELS (2)****[Back Cover]**

- Samuel **Barber** *Cello Sonata, Op. 6* (1932) Hsin-I Huang, Piano
1. *I. Allegro ma non troppo*
  2. *II. Adagio; presto; adagio*
  3. *III. Allegro Appassionato*
4. Laura **Schwendinger** *All the Pretty Little Horses* (2018) for Unaccompanied Cello
- Erwin **Schulhoff** *Duo for Violin and Cello* (1925) Sahada Buckley, Violin
5. *I. Moderato*
  6. *II. Zingaresca*
  7. *III. Andantino*
  8. *IV. Moderato*
- Melinda **Wagner** *Limbic Notes* (2023) for Unaccompanied Cello
9. *I. Fidget*
  10. *II. Hushing song*
  11. *III. Devilkin*
- Guillaume **Connesson** *Les Chants de L'Agartha, "The Songs of Agartha"* (2008) Hsin-I Huang, Piano
12. *I. Sous le desert de Mongolie, "Beneath the Mongolian Desert"*
  13. *II. La bibliothèque des savoirs perdus, "The Library of Lost Knowledge"*
  14. *III. Danse devant le roi du monde, "Dance for the King of the World"*

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***INNER PANELS (1)*****[Personal Note and Artist Biography]**

*TRACE JOHNSON is an audio diary made of emotional outbursts, secret songs, daydreams, and personal stories from the heart. While many questions remain unanswered, these works point a way forward. I have assembled some of my most cherished pieces; these ones have given me courage, helped me to grow, and given me insight into the mysteries of the universe. They are earthbound songs that reach for the stars...at least they have been for me. I hope you may find joy in these pieces; they are yours now just as much as they are mine.*

*It is with sincere gratitude that I was able to record this music with my dear friends and colleagues pianist, Hsin-I Huang and violinist Sahada Buckley. Throughout the creation of this album, my production team, recording engineer, Ric Probst, and my two producers, cellist, Parry Karp and cellist, Karl Lavine, were incredible colleagues that helped to bring this album to fruition.*

*-Trace Johnson*

**[Artist Bio]**

Trace Johnson is a cellist known for his effortless musicality and fierce commitment to music-making of all styles and genres. Originally from Madison, Wisconsin, Trace has appeared as a chamber musician, soloist, and orchestral musician in a wide variety of settings in the United States and around the world. Equally at home teaching in the studio or performing on stage, Trace is a devoted and thoughtful communicator who enjoys a varied career as a cellist, teacher, and musician. Trace holds cello positions with the Sarasota Orchestra, Madison Symphony Orchestra, and the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra. Trace has recently appeared on Masterworks programs with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and the Artosphere Festival Orchestra in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Trace is a regular performer and presenter at the Eastern Shore Chamber Music Festival in Fairhope, Alabama where he is one of two Co-Artistic Directors. Trace is also a regular performer at the Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society, a critically acclaimed summer chamber music festival in Madison, Wisconsin.

***INNER PANELS (2)*****[Album Information]*****Cello*** – Trace Johnson***Piano*** – Hsin-I Huang***Violin*** – Sahada Buckley***Engineered*** by Ric Probst (*Remote Planet, NŌ Studios, Milwaukee, WI*)***Produced*** by Karl Lavine and Parry Karp (*Madison, WI*)***Mixing, Editing, Mastering*** by Ric Probst***Liner Notes*** by Trace Johnson***Microphones:****(2) Neumann km 84 small capsule cardioid condenser microphones (circa 1970s)**(2) Schoeps Collette series CMC 6/MK4 small capsule cardioid condenser microphones (circa 1990s)**(2) B&K 4006 small capsule condenser omni-microphones**(1) Neumann km 84 microphone**(1) Myburgh M1 large capsule tube condenser microphone (circa 2020)**(1) Neumann Usm-69i large cap stereo condenser microphone (circa 1970s)**(1) Royer SF 24 stereo ribbon microphone****Additional Hardware:****Microphone Preamp: Grace Design 801 MkII Microphone Preamp**Universal Audio Apollo Analog-Digital Interface**Pro Tools Digital Audio Workstation****Album Art*** – Sahada Buckley***Design*** – Albany RecordsRecorded in the **Hamel Music Center** at the **University of Wisconsin-Madison, Paul Collins Recital Hall** in **July, 2023** and **January, 2024**.

Support for this research was provided by the University of Wisconsin – Madison College of Letters and Sciences.

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### INNER PANELS (3)

#### [Hsin-I Huang and Sahada Buckley Artist Biographies]



**Dr. Hsin-I Huang**, Taiwanese-American classical pianist, has captivated audiences the world over with his emotional virtuoso performances by evincing masterfully dexterous playing and profound musical sensitivity. Over his illustrious career and with his impressive range, he has won high acclaim and numerous awards performing across the United States, Europe and Asia. As both a soloist and chamber musician, he maintains a rigorous performance schedule with some 60 concerts each year. He has released two solo albums: his 2015 debut “Bach/Busoni-Brahms-Schumann” and his 2016 follow-up “Mighty Shadow – Rachmaninoff – Mussorgsky.”

At the age of eight, Dr. Huang gave his first public performance in his hometown of Taipei, Taiwan and debuted in the United States at the age of sixteen at the world-renowned Carnegie Hall in New York City. He has made frequent appearances on the Carnegie stage ever since. As a soloist, Dr. Huang has performed with such distinguished orchestras as the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra, Evergreen Symphony Orchestra, Spectrum Symphony New York, and the Raleigh Symphony Orchestra. He has had the honor of performing with renowned and venerable musicians including Zuill Bailey, Joshua Bell, Renée Fleming, Alexander Kobrin, Sidney Outlaw, Phil Setzer, Wendy Warner, Ransom Wilson and The Rousseau Quartet. Dr. Huang has also traveled extensively on tour with Taiwan’s EVA Airlines orchestra, Evergreen Symphony Orchestra, as their soloist — with his performances further featured on EVA’s in-flight entertainment systems around the world.

**Sahada Buckley** is a violinist, violist and interdisciplinary artist whose diverse career has led to many meaningful collaborations. Sahada has worked with many notable classical musicians including faculty from University of California: Los Angeles, Michigan State University and the Pro Arte String Quartet. Additionally, she has worked closely with acclaimed composers like David Ludwig, Michael Ippolito, Laura Schwendinger, Mason Bates, George Meyer and Will Healy. Sahada received her Master of Music Degree in Violin Performance from the University of Wisconsin – Madison where she was a member of the prestigious graduate string quartet, the Marvin Rabin String Quartet. Sahada earned dual Bachelor of Music Degrees in Violin Performance and Music Theory from the University of Georgia where she studied with Levon Ambartsumian and Shakhida Azimkhodjaeva. She won first prize at the University of Georgia Concerto Competition performing Édouard Lalo’s Violin Concerto “Symphonie Espagnole” in 2018. Sahada has participated in many summer music festivals including Midsummer’s Music in Door County, Meadowmount School of Music, BUTI Tanglewood, Green Mountain Music Festival, Montecito Music Festival, Atlantic Music Festival, and Decoda Chamber Music Festival. She has performed in major venues across the United States and abroad in Brazil, London, and Singapore. Sahada plays viola regularly with the Ancora String Quartet. As a non-classical performer, Sahada has partnered with musicians within the free improvisation community on a national level. In April of 2022, Sahada was invited to perform with her experimental duo, *Girls With Hands*, at the New York City Electroacoustic Improvisation Summit. Sahada is the Co-Artistic Director and Co-Executive Director of The Eastern Shore Chamber Music Festival based in Fairhope, Alabama. An avid hiker, Sahada through-hiked the Appalachian Trail in 2019 with a violin in her backpack.



***INNER PANELS (4-6)***

**[Liner Notes]**

The assortment of music for *TRACE JOHNSON* is diverse; even each individual piece cannot be categorized succinctly. The compositions for the album are not representative of any one singular musical heritage; these works are neo versions of the musical heritages they come from. For example, the Barber cello sonata evinces all the hallmarks of neo-romanticism: extended harmonies and tonalities, contrasting textures, departure from traditional forms, and a flare for fiery drama. The Schulhoff Duo for Violin and Cello was influenced by Czech folk music, dadaism, modernism, dance music from 1920's, jazz, and blues in addition to the second Viennese school and late Romanticists. While Connesson's *Les Chants de L'Agartha* musical aesthetic has kinship to French impressionist composers, like Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy, the duo showcases the composers influences outside of impressionism as well. *All the Pretty Little Horses* by Laura Schwendinger weaves together a famous American folksong with her own brand of contemporary writing. As a performer, I have always been drawn to the breaking of boundaries in music; the 'neo' chamber works for the album are perfect examples of composers blending different musical lineages together and, consequently, breaking musical expectations in the process.

***Samuel Barber -- Cello Sonata in C Minor, Op. 6 (1932)***

Barber's Cello Sonata in C Minor, Op. 6 is an earnest, heartfelt work that exhibits many of the composer's inherent 'neo' inclinations while also relating to traditional classical structures and romantic compositional styles. The sonata was composed in 1932 while Barber was still a triple-major student in voice, piano, and composition at the Curtis Institute; although Barber wrote the work at the onset of his career, it is a mature composition. Cellist, Orlando Cole, and Samuel Barber made the initial premieres of the sonata as students at the Curtis Institute and the work was later performed by all the top cellists of the era including Felix Salmond and Gregor Piatagorsky. Like one of Barber's most well-known works, *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, the cello sonata is, at its core, a "lyric rhapsody"<sup>14</sup>, that effectively marries modernism with romantic tonal worlds.

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<sup>14</sup> Heyman, Samuel Barber, 280.

Barber frames expressive melodic simplicity masterfully within the rhythmically complex neoromantic writing of the first movement of his cello sonata. The composer builds on musical forms perfected by Brahms and Beethoven and imprints his own unique brand of modernism. The first movement's extensive use of the minor sixth motive is reminiscent of Brahms' second cello sonata opening motive; also, the cross rhythms between the cello and piano in the second theme of the movement feel connected to Brahms melodic writing style as well. Where Barber makes a clean break from Brahms is in the episodic and wandering development section; extended harmonies and unresolved cadences place the conflicted protagonist in a smokey, semi-opaque atmosphere until romantic cries burst from the cello line leading into the recapitulation. The closing material features an improvisatory cadenza in the cello and foreshadows the stormy ending of the final movement of the sonata.

The second movement, both a fast and slow movement, is a joyful daydream sandwiched between two sincere, heartfelt confessions. The stark piano voicing and simple melodic writing calms the conflicted sentiments of the first movement in a profound way; the relinquishment of anxiety from the first movement at the onset of the second is truly breathtaking. The fast middle section, *Presto*, instantly uncoils from the weighty *Adagio* and releases its energy in two extended musical phrases before evaporating into the second *Adagio* section of the movement. The triplets from the *Presto* section must have been a precursor for some of the writing in Barber's Violin Concerto, Op. 14 *III. Presto in moto perpetuo*; the writing from the cello sonata is noticeably like the triplet motives found in the third movement of the violin concerto he would write seven years later. The final *Adagio* reconciles the movement and creates ample room for the turbulent opening of the final movement of the sonata.

Episodic, fraught, and improvisatory, the last movement of the sonata is the most neoromantic of the three; the structure of *Allegro appassionato* is serpentine and formless and does not follow a logical path. Extended harmonies and wandering tonalities, rather than a singular tonality with subservient functional harmonies, are the prevailing harmonic language of the movement. The thematic material within the movement expresses beyond the sentiments expressed in the first two movements, cadencing in a fiery, foreboding closing section at the end of the sonata.

***Laura Schwendinger -- All the Pretty Little Horses (2018)***

*All the Pretty Little Horses* by University Wisconsin-Madison, Professor of Composition, Laura Schwendinger, was commissioned in 2018 for the Music Institute of Chicago. The work, lyrical in nature, is based off

the American folk song *All the Pretty Horses*. In an interview with the composer, Laura relayed to me that folk music was a significant part of her upbringing and that her father used to sing her the melody as a lullaby when she was growing up. As a young person, she was exposed to many folk singers and musicians at home through her father; American folk icons and musicians, like Pete Seeger, were hosted at her home frequently and this exposure at an early age fostered a deeply set interest in folk music for her life as a composer. One significant takeaway from Laura's experience with folk music as a child was that, "folk music can have great lessons for 'serious' art composers. [The melody of *All the Pretty Little Horses*] is so expertly crafted; Brahms would have enjoyed this melody."<sup>15</sup> In *ATPLH*, Laura creates a musical 'home' with the melody from *All the Pretty Horses* and returns to it several times throughout the course of the piece. Laura positions the central melody in a nocturnal setting to generate the narrative of her going to sleep in her bed as a child, her father turning off the lights after singing the melody, and then leaving her alone in the dark with fears of the unknown.<sup>16</sup> The rhythms of the score are fluid, or liquid, in affect and it was Laura's intention to build the rubato into the piece via the complex rhythms themselves; although the rhythmic language of the piece is demanding for the cellist, they afford a flowing, improvisatory quality within the piece.

#### *Erwin Schulhoff -- Duo for Violin and Cello (1925)*

In 1925, Czech composer Erwin Schulhoff synthesized European musical traditions with modern compositional languages in a cohesive, convincing work for violin and cello. Schulhoff's Duo for Violin and Cello is a potent mixture of musical styles and genres; expertly crafted for the two stringed instruments, the dynamic and virtuosic writing within the somewhat unknown duo ranks it at the top of the genre next to the duos of Maurice Ravel and Zoltan Kodaly. Schulhoff, who tragically died young from tuberculosis in Weissenberg while a prisoner of the Nazis in 1942, paid homage to composers like Leoš Janáček during the last significant writing period Schulhoff had, 1923-1933. "At the time of the duo's composition, Schulhoff's output had already consisted of works that fit in both the late Romantic and the "bipolar movements of Expressionism and dadaism."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Schwendinger, Laura. "Interview with composer Laura Schwendinger for All the Pretty Little Horses." Zoom. February 20, 2024. [https://youtu.be/wp28\\_wh4YuI](https://youtu.be/wp28_wh4YuI).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Schulhoff, Erwin." *Grove Music Online*, 20 Jan. 2001, doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25128.

Schulhoff's departure from late Romanticism can be viewed in a variety of ways. Schulhoff's atonal writing style, penchant for polytonality, and vertical rhythmic language predominates the landscape of the music from the opening of the first movement. Schulhoff repurposes thematic material from folksongs, like Béla Bartók or Bohuslav Martinů, throughout the work and particularly in the raucous, gypsy inspired *Zingaresca*. The outer movements of the duo deviate from traditional forms both in structure and tempo; the first movement tempi indications are *Moderato*, *Allegretto*, *Tranquillo*, *Moderato*, *Agitato*, *Molto tranquillo (Andante)* and the final movement tempi are *Moderato*, *Allegro deciso*, *Moderato*, *Presto fanatico*: both outer movements are through-composed, often with *ritardandi* or *accelerandi* connecting musical sections together. Although not an impressionist by any degree, the free-form flow of the duo is reminiscent of works from French composer Claude Debussy whom the composer studied with briefly in 1913.<sup>18</sup> Like Debussy's Cello Sonata, Schulhoff uses nearly every extended technique made available to him from the period throughout the composition; false harmonics, left hand pizzicati, *col legno*, mutes, *sur la touche*, double-stop harmonics, and syncopated pizzicato/arco make the duo particularly colorful and dynamic. Unlike the other three movements, which challenge the listener to some degree, romanticism is presented in bold terms in the third movement, *Andantino*, via a hushing love song. Like Arnold Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, the melodic writing found in the *Andantino* is stunningly beautiful, tonal, and songlike. The final movement reconfigures motivic material and theme groups from the first movement and builds on them; the final *Presto fanatico* races to the finish with rustic flair. Erwin Schulhoff's Duo for Violin and Cello seamlessly weaves the fibers of many different influences together into a vibrant patchwork of exhilarating virtuosity.

### ***Melinda Wagner -- Limbic Notes (2024) PREMIER***

*Limbic Notes* is a new unaccompanied cello work from composer, Melinda Wagner; my recording of *Limbic Notes* will be the premiere recording of the piece. Melinda Wagner, who won the Pulitzer Prize for her Flute Concerto, *Concerto for Flute, Strings, and Percussion* in 1999, continues to be an active composer in contemporary music circles today while working as a Professor of Composition at The Juilliard School in New York. Working with Melinda on *Limbic Notes* remotely was a challenge and she was very patient to answer my questions about the piece over the eight-month period leading up to the recording of the piece for 'TRACE JOHNSON'. One characteristic of her music

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<sup>18</sup> "Schulhoff, Erwin." *Grove Music Online*, 20 Jan. 2001, doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25128.

that you notice right away when listening to one of her pieces, like the Flute Concerto for example, is her ever-evolving musical flow; this quality in the music is embedded into *Limbic Notes* as well. The title, *Limbic Notes*, is in reference to the limbic system, which is a complex system of nerves and networks in the brain that are concerned with instinct and mood; the three movements are exactly that- instinctual, variable, and emotional.

Melinda shared with me that her musical goals for the piece were to 1) compose a piece for solo cello, something she had not previously done before, 2) include music that was lyrical, singing, and melancholic (*II. Hushing Song*), and 3) to create outer movements that were more mercurial and ‘punchy’, while testing the limits of the instrument.<sup>19</sup> *I. Fidget* and *III. Devilkin*, are indeed mercurial and equipped with fast changes in mood and spirit, sometimes as frequent as every new measure; there is also some very technical playing in these outer movements that tested my technical chops, particularly in executing fast, rhythmic music with varying dynamics. The outer movements of the work contain some interesting extended techniques, like jazzy quarter tone pizzicati and four-string sul ponticello ricochet; these movements require the player to think outside the traditional technical ‘box’ that classical players are typically equipped with. The heart of the movement, *II. Hushing Song*, was how I was initially introduced to Melinda; I worked on the movement with her in-person at the Atlantic Music Festival in Waterville, Maine where I premiered the work in draft form. The intervallic relationships in *Hushing song* were of significance to Melinda when composing the piece and, upon listening, they have special, expressive intention in the music. Expressive shifts in the upper register of the cello solicit a soulful message within the lullaby-like movement. Melinda Wagner honored me by finishing *Limbic Notes* for me to play in Spring 2023 several months after my live performance at AMF.

#### ***Guillaume Connesson -- Les Chants de L'Agartha (2008)***

French composer Guillaume Connesson’s *Les Chants de L'Agartha* is a contemporary duo for cello and piano that depicts the fairytale of the lost city of *Agartha*. The opening movement describes the wonders of the lost city, *Agartha*, buried deep beneath the Mongolian Desert. The slow and powerful musical arc of the first movement is dispersed through an awesome rendition of quasi-impressionism; the music steadily unfolds similarly to the opening section of the orchestral suite of *Daphnis et Chloé* by Maurice Ravel, if not in a darker affect. The modal harmonies

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<sup>19</sup> Wagner, Melinda. “Interview Questions.” Email received by Trace Johnson. 22 February 2024.

in the first movement and the modal-planing, (a compositional technique where the composer repurposes a chord by copying it to other areas of the score while presenting it in the same configuration as the original chord), found in the piano writing in the *Animer progressivement* and *Plus animé* sections are very much within the French impressionist world. Only in the expansive, sonorous melodic writing of the middle section of the movement does *I. Sous le desert de Mongolie* veer away from the hazy, impressionistic atmosphere Connesson presents at the top of the movement. The white heat of the middle section, *Plus animé*, sounds as if it could be from one of the late romantic melodic composers, like Richard Strauss or César Franck; surely the extroverted quality of the middle section draws on influences outside of French impressionism.

In *II. La Bibliothèque des Savoirs Perdus*, the cello and piano dialogue curiously, each taking turns navigating the *Library of Lost Knowledge*. The playful interplay between the two instruments is reminiscent of Debussy Cello Sonata's second movement, *Sérénade: Modérément animé*. The *Lent* sections provide sudden tempo and textural changes that give the protagonist pause; it is almost as if the solo piano chords within these *Lent* sections are echoes ringing out into the expanse of the enormous, imagined space. Again, these changes in tempo and texture also feel related to Debussy. The starry-eyed, crystallized final *Très Lent* is one of the most recognizably impressionistic sections of the movement in that it is slow, formless, modal, and without any discernable melody.

Contrasting the closing material of the second movement, the third movement's opening is muscular to a degree that is beyond the realm of Impressionism; the final movement, whose grotesque main theme consists of dotted quarters and eighth notes, is easy to imagine within a neoclassical symphony from a modernist composer like Dmitri Shostakovich. The highly technical writing found in the final movement of *Les Chants* has similarities to Sergei Prokofiev's Cello Sonata, Op. 119 third movement and Francis Poulenc's Cello Sonata FP 143. The sharp dynamic changes, virtuosic technical writing, and blistering tempi within Poulenc Cello Sonata's *III. Ballabile* and *IV. Finale*, for example, feel related to *Les Chants'* third movement, *III. Danse Devant le Roi du Monde*, (*Dance for the Kind of the World*). The running sixteenth passagework in *Les Chants* third movement functions similarly to passagework found in Prokofiev's third movement from his cello sonata. Unlike any of the music from Prokofiev or Poulenc's cello sonatas, this final movement is both menacing and sacrificial in character; both performers are pushed to their technical limits with the quarter note at 176, *Presto furioso*. Frankly speaking, the final movement of *Les Chants* draws to mind sacrificial scenes from the Paramount block-buster movie, *Indiana Jones: Temple of Doom* or perhaps the ballet, *The*

*Rite of Spring* by composer Igor Stravinsky. Conneson's *Les Chants de L'Agartha* (2008) is one of the greatest additions to the cello duo canon in the past twenty years.

## VI. Conclusion

Since the recording of the album has been completed, I have noticed the way I listen to recordings has changed; I am listening to recordings I have known for years with 'new' ears. I can hear edits in classical recordings which is something that I never used to do or would have thought to listen for. The experience has trained me how to listen even more carefully and perhaps prepared me to some degree for work as a producer someday. The next major steps for this project are planning the CD release concerts and fundraising the remaining money for the album, but I am happy with how things have turned out so far. For my first major recording project, we managed to create a solid product and on a relatively low budget. For future projects, I could lower the budget even further by doing the edits myself in the digital audio workstation, ProTools, instead of hiring an engineer to assemble the takes together for me. To manage the deadlines that were imposed from start, working with Ric was the most efficient way to assemble the edits for mastering for this project. The multiple stages of preparation for this project, the drafting of the pieces, and the long timeline, which doled out different jobs and responsibilities along the way, gave me unique insight into my approach to music and future projects. Communication proved to be one of the most important pieces of the project; I am in debt to my collaborators who taught me how to become and even better communicator and artist and look forward to engaging with future projects with the information I gained from creating '*TRACE JOHNSON*'.

## VII. Appendices, Appendix 1

## All the Pretty Little Horses Score, page 1

**All the Pretty Little Horses**

Laura Elise Schwendinger

Musical score for "All the Pretty Little Horses" by Laura Elise Schwendinger. The score is written for a single instrument, likely a violin or viola, and consists of six systems of music. The first system (measures 1-3) is in 7/16 time, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 46. It features a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a triplet (3) and a 6:4 ratio. The second system (measures 4-6) is in 3/8 time, with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and includes a 14:12 ratio and a pizzicato (*pizz.*) instruction. The third system (measures 7-9) is in 2/4 time, with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic and includes a quintuplet (5). The fourth system (measures 10-12) is in 2/4 time, with a piano (*p*) dynamic, a *sul pont.* instruction, and an *arco* tempo marking of quarter note = 60. The fifth system (measures 13-15) is in 2/4 time. The sixth system (measures 16-18) is in 2/4 time, with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic, a tempo marking of quarter note = 64, and an *ord. poco a poco* instruction. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.



Appendix 2

All the Pretty Little Horses Annotated Score, page 1

*Straighten bow out*

All the Pretty Little Horses

Laura Elise Schwendinger

The musical score is written for a single instrument, likely a violin, and consists of several systems of music. The first system starts with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = 46$  and a dynamic of *p*. It includes various bowing and fingering annotations such as *n*, *v*, *3*, and *3̄*. The second system continues with a dynamic of *mf* and includes a *mp* marking. The third system features a *pizz.* (pizzicato) marking and a *pp* (pianissimo) marking. The fourth system includes a *sul pont.* (sul ponticello) marking and a tempo change to  $\text{♩} = 60$ . The fifth system has a *p* marking and includes a red bracket above the staff. The sixth system has a *mp* marking and includes a *ord. poco a poco* (order, poco a poco) marking. The score is heavily annotated with handwritten notes, including the phrase "Straighten bow out" in red ink at the top left. The annotations include various bowing techniques (*n*, *v*), fingerings (*1*, *2*, *3*, *4*), and dynamic markings (*p*, *mf*, *mp*, *pp*). The score is written in a single staff with a treble clef and a 7/16 time signature.

Appendix 3

Limbic Notes: I. Fidget Score, page 1

2

for Trace Johnson

# Limbic Notes

for solo Cello

MELINDA WAGNER

Duration: c. ????

## I. Fidget

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 80$   
(ord.) ----- m.s.p. ----- ord.

*pp* *sfz* *p* *sfz* *sfzpp* *sfzmf* *poco rit.*

*a tempo*  
*p* *a bit insect-like*

*slower, heavily*  
*f*

*a tempo (as before)*  
*sfz*

*sfz* *poco* *smfz*

s.p.  
(II) 0 ----- ord. *short*

*p* *poco* *p* *pp*

**Weird, slithery**  
s.t., quasi gliss.  
*mp* *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp* *p* *pp*

**Slightly slower, and played as if from another piece**  
*rit.* ----- *a tempo*

ord. 3 *gliss. melodramatic* ----- s.p.  
*f* *3* *fp* *f* *p* *cresc. poco a poco*

Appendix 4

Limbic Notes: I. Fidget Annotated Score, page 1

Duration: c. ????

for solo Cello

MELINDA WAGNER

I. Fidget

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 80$

*poco rit.*

*sfzpp* *sfzmf*

*a tempo*  
*p* *a bit insect-like*

*pp* *MOLTO CRESC.* *f*

*a tempo (as before)*  
*sfzp* *p*

*sfzp* *poco* *smfz*

12 *s.p.* *same tempo*  
*p* *poco* *pp* *short*

14 *Weird, slithery*  
*s.t., quasi gliss*  
*mp* *pp* *mp* *pp*

*Slightly slower, and played as if from another piece*  
*rit.* *a tempo*  
*ord. 3* *gliss* *melodramatic* *cresc. poco a poco*

16 *f* *pp* *f* *p* *sul pont.*

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Appendix 5

Limbic Notes: III. Devilkin Score, page 8

8

63 **Raucous, big! Slightly slower**

\* Slap fingerboard with all four fingers of the left hand on I, II and III. Pitches are approximate.  
 † = chop

66 **a tempo**

69

72

\* ♯ = one quarter flat; ♭ = three-quarters flat

**Tantrum!** arco; slide hand position up → s.p.

78

Appendix 6

Limbic Notes: III. Devilkin Score, page 9

82 *very short* *poco rit.* *a tempo* *slide hand position up* *s.p.* *poco rit.*

**Bombastic, then...becoming more tuneful**  
**subito meno mosso**

85 *ord., full bows* *espr.* *pochiss. rit.* *a tempo*

89 **Tempo I** *a bit unsure* *pizz.* *arco* *gaining confidence*

93 *(cresc.)*

96 *f* *mp*

99 *f* *poco rit.*

103 *with bravado!* *rit.* *cresc.* *molto* *ff*

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