

FACULTY EMERITUS RECITAL

Nils Vigeland,
composer

Pale Fire

Jing Yang (BM '10, DMA '15), **Nacho Ojeda** (MM '23),
Adrian Blanco (MM '16), and **Fei-Fei**, piano



Council on the Arts

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GORDON K. AND HARRIET GREENFIELD HALL

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PROGRAM

Nils Vigeland

Pale Fire for piano (2023)
(World Premiere)

Canto One

Jing Yang, piano

Canto Two

Nacho Ojeda, piano

Canto Three

Adrian Blanco, piano

Canto Four

Fei-Fei, piano

Pale Fire by Vladimir Nabokov. Copyright © 1962 The Vladimir Nabokov
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PROGRAM NOTE

Pale Fire is a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. The book is in four parts:

- 1) A foreword by one Charles Kinbote, who may or may not be the exiled king of Zembla, in which he describes his friendship with John Shade, a distinguished American poet, and the circumstances by which Kinbote has come into possession of the manuscript of Shade's poem, *Pale Fire*.
- 2) The 999-line poem, *Pale Fire*, by John Shade.
- 3) Kinbote's commentary on the poem.
- 4) An index

The labyrinthian structure of the novel defies a concise summary but a few central points should be made. The poem in four cantos is a meditation on Shade's family life, his happy marriage to childhood sweetheart, Sybil, shadowed by the suicide of his only child, and his quest for an understanding of life after death. Kinbote, Shade's neighbor and fellow faculty member at Wordsworth College believes, however, that the poem is a reflection of Kinbote's former life as Charles the Beloved, exiled king of Zembla, which Kinbote has been describing to Shade during his encounters and walks with the poet. The commentary is therefore an interpretation of the poem through Kinbote's twisted imagination.

My piece is a response only to the poem, each line of which is "set." In this sense the piece could be thought of as an "opera without words," the two primary characters being John and Sybil Shade. Like the poem, the piece is in four parts. Here follows a brief summary, preceded by a few lines of each Canto's opening, of what can be described as the "events" of each Canto and section of the piece.

Canto One

I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure of in the windowpane;
I was the smudge of ashen fluff-and I
Lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky.

Shade recalls his youth, the death of his parents when an infant, and his upbringing by eccentric Aunt Maud. An early experience of blacking out instills in him a sense of the possibility of altered consciousness.

Canto Two

There was a time in my demented youth
When somehow I suspected that the truth
About survival after death was known
To every human being: I alone
Knew nothing, and a great conspiracy
Of books and people hid the truth from me.

An evocation of the domestic life of John, Sybil and Hazel Shade, the adored but unhappy daughter, who drowns herself one night after being jilted by a blind date.

Canto Three

L'if, lifeless tree! Your great Maybe, Rabelais:
The grand potato.

This opening of the Canto is indicative of Nabokov's wordplay and breadth of association. A brief aside to untangle the two lines:

L'if – (French for yew tree)

lifeless tree – the yew in Celtic culture symbolizes death and resurrection.
Its needles are also toxic.

Your great Maybe, Rabelais – Rabelais's last words are reported to have been
“I go to seek a Great Perhaps (French: “grande peut-être”) which Shade
translates as “The grand potato”.

Shade's search for the “white fountain”, a vision of the afterlife sensed during a heart attack. The Canto concludes with a visit to an elderly woman who is reported to have had the same vision though Shade discovers she saw a “white mountain.”

Life Everlasting-based on a misprint!

Canto Four

Now I shall spy on beauty as none has
Spied on it yet. Now I shall cry out as
None has cried out. Now I shall try what none
Has tried. Now I shall do what none has done.

A series of dramatic assertions – followed by quotidian observations of no special import. Shade veers away from cosmic speculation towards a view of life made tolerable by ordinary pleasures, such as shaving in a bathtub, a ritual given thirty lines in the canto. The poem concludes:

And through the flowing shade and ebbing light
A man, unheedful of the butterfly-
Some neighbor's gardener, I guess-goes by
Trundling an empty barrow up the lane.

Of course, without access to or knowledge of most of the text, the relationship of poetry to music in my piece is tenuous. What I hope can emerge is the strange expressive balance in the poem between the ecstatic and mundane, not unlike Kinbote's commentary, both particular and absurd.

–Nils Vigeland

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Nils Vigeland, composer

The son of musicians, Nils Vigeland was born in Buffalo in 1950. He made his professional debut as a pianist in 1969 with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, Lukas Foss, conductor. He later studied composition with Foss at Harvard College, graduating with a BA in 1972. He earned his PhD at University at Buffalo–SUNY where he studied composition with Morton Feldman and piano with Yvar Mikhashoff. With these mentors he was fortunate in developing long personal and professional associations.

His first orchestral piece was conducted by Foss with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra in 1970 and Foss gave the first performance of *One Three Five* with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra in 1983.

Mikhashoff was instrumental in the commission and performance of many pieces, including the *Piano Concerto* (Oslo Radio Orchestra), *In Black and White* (Buffalo Philharmonic), and *False Love/True Love* (English National Opera).

Alongside flautist Eberhard Blum and percussionist Jan Williams, Vigeland toured for eight years with Feldman as “Morton Feldman and Soloists,” performing the extended length works for flute, percussion, and piano that Feldman composed for them. They recorded these pieces on HAT ART.

Between 1980 and 1989, Vigeland directed the Bowery Ensemble which gave an annual series of concerts at Cooper Union. The ensemble was strongly associated with the music of the New York School and gave the first performance of over thirty works. In more recent years he has collaborated on CDs with Jenny Chai (Naxos), Delea Shand (Apple Music) and Daniel Lippel, John Popham, and Reiko Fütting (New Focus). His choral music is published by Boosey and Hawkes. He taught at Manhattan School of Music for thirty years, retiring as Chair of the Composition Department in 2013. *Pale Fire* is the culmination of Vigeland’s more than 50-year relationship with the novel and Nabokov’s work in general.

Jing Yang (BM ’10, DMA ’15), piano

Praised by *New York Magazine* as “. . .so young but so accomplished. . .” Chinese-born pianist Jing Yang has been recognized as a soloist, chamber musician, and ensemble player by audiences worldwide. As a recitalist she has given solo performances the U.S., China, Germany, Russia, France, Spain, Japan, and Taiwan, among others. After her New York City debut in 2006 at Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall, Dr. Yang was invited to give a solo recital tour in Europe with stops in Valladolid, Madrid, Paris,

and Berlin. In her homeland China, her recital tours have brought her to Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang, Hangzhou, and other major cities. She has also been invited as special guest performer at Russian Embassy and Polish Consulate in Beijing. In 2010 she was invited as both a recitalist and lecturer to the Hangzhou Normal University and Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. In the summer of 2011 Dr. Yang performed on Wall Street as part of the Maiden Lane Concert Series organized by the Juilliard School and the *New York Times*. She has appeared as a soloist with the Saint Petersburg Philharmonic Symphony in Japan, DePaul Symphony Orchestra in Chicago Symphony Orchestra Center, New Juilliard Ensemble in Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center as part of the *Focus!* festival, and Manhattan School of Music's Brass Ensemble. In 2014, Dr. Yang performed as the soloist for the Opening Ceremony of Youth Olympic Games, representing the Americas.

As a chamber musician Dr. Yang has performed extensively with vocalists, strings, woodwinds, and brass instruments in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center for performing Arts, Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, Merkin Hall, and Abrons Arts Center. She has toured with her Juilliard Piano Trio in major universities and music conservatories in China. As a guest lecturer at Rutgers University in 2009, Dr. Yang introduced contemporary chamber music featuring Erhu, a traditional Chinese instrument, followed by a recital. Besides the traditional repertoire, Dr. Yang has also been a frequent advocate of new music, working collaboratively with composers and new music ensembles from the United States, Germany, Israel, Japan, Mexico, and China.

As a winner of multiple international piano competitions, Dr. Yang won first prize at the Munz Scholarship Competition in New York, second prize at the Eastman International Piano Competition, and third prize in both the Beijing Piano Competition for Young Artists and the Chopin International Piano Competition in Taipei. She won the special prize in the St. Petersburg International Piano Competition, and fourth prize in the Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition for Young Musicians. In 2005 she recorded demo CDs and DVDs for the National Piano Grading Examination hosted by Zhou Guangren in China. Dr. Yang joined Si-Yo Music Society Foundation since 2015. She held many fund raising and outreach concerts for the community.

Dr. Yang holds a Bachelor's degree and a Doctorate of musical arts from Manhattan School of Music. She received her Master's degree at the Juilliard School. She was the music director of Sephardic Academy of Manhattan from 2011–2015. Dr. Yang currently teaches at Extension Division of Mason Gross

School at Rutgers University and MSM's Distance Learning Program. She also became staff pianist and chamber coach for violinist and conductor Pinchas Zukerman's program at MSM in 2017 and served as piano faculty and chamber music faculty for Young Artist Program at National Arts Center in Ottawa, Canada. She has been a Steinway Artist since 2010.

Nacho Ojeda (MM '23), piano

Nacho Ojeda is a musician, pianist, and interdisciplinary performer based in New York City. Born in Sevilla, Spain in 1995, he began his studies at the age of 5. He earned his Bachelor of Music in piano performance in the Royal Conservatory of Music of Madrid and a Master of Music in classical piano performance in the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Finland, as well as a Master's in contemporary performance at Manhattan School of Music under renowned musicians Peggy Kampmeier and Anthony de Mare.

Nacho is deeply interested in the music of our time and the inventive possibilities new music provides in terms of performance and collaboration among artists of different disciplines. He understands composition, performance, and improvisation as three sides of the same process—music-making—and approaches music with passion and intention regardless of its genre.

He has inspired and premiered works by composers Samuel Torres, Wong Foo Jeng, and Luis McDougal, among many others in the New York City scene. Additionally, he has premiered several works from leading Spanish and Latin-American composers with friend and violinist María Muñoz, including pieces by Agustín González Acilu, Miguel Bustamante, Pedro Guajardo, Roberto Mosquera, Jorge Grundman, Eduardo Costa, and Miguel Ángel Santaella, and collaborated with many more during his time in Madrid. In the new music opera scene, he was part of the world premiere production of the stage version of Ruby Fulton's opera *Adam's Run*, as well as having been the lead keyboardist and harpsichordist in the world premiere of the microtonal opera *Flash: The Two Deaths of Andy Warhol* composed by Finnish composer Juhani Nuorvala.

Adrian Blanco (MM '16), piano

Born in Santa Coloma de Gramanet (Barcelona) in 1991, Adrian Blanco is an accomplished concert pianist and chamber musician praised for his “technical virtuosity and musical understanding” (Einojuhani Rautavaara). His performances have been described by Spanish newspaper *ABC* as “magnificent” and “exquisite” and by *La Vanguardia* as “excellent”.

Since his debut as a soloist at the age of 15 performing W. A. Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor, K. 466 with the Orchestra of Santa Coloma, Mr. Blanco has performed in venues and concert halls across Europe and the U.S., and has been awarded first prize in competitions such as the Isaac Albéniz Competition and Sant Anastasi de Lleida competitions.

As a passionate exponent of new music, Mr. Blanco has commissioned and premiered work by composers as J. Magrané, E. Rautavaara and J. Psathas. His collaboration with living composers and incorporation of multimedia visuals and theatrical elements in his performances reflects his commitment to the cultural landscape of contemporary art forms.

Mr. Blanco obtained a Bachelor's degree with honors from the Superior School of Music of Catalonia in the class of Pierre Réach and a Master's degree in contemporary performance from Manhattan School of Music under the mentorship of Margaret Kampmeier, Anthony de Mare, Christopher Oldfather, and Lucy Shelton.

Fei-Fei, piano

Praised for her "bountiful gifts and passionate immersion into the music she touches" (*The Plain Dealer*), pianist Fei-Fei is a winner of the Concert Artists Guild Competition and a top finalist at the 14th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. She continues to garner a reputation for her poetic interpretations, charming audiences with her "passion, piquancy and tenderness" and "winning stage presence" (*Dallas Morning News*), both in the U.S. and internationally, including her native China.

Fei-Fei's concert tours have taken her across the globe in concerto performances, recitals, and chamber music collaborations alike. Highlights from her current season include solo and chamber recitals in eleven states across the United States; concerto highlights include performances of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 at Lincoln Center with the Pegasus Symphony, a special New Year's concert with California's Pacific Symphony, and appearances with the Syracuse Symphony, Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic, Flint Symphony, Amarillo Symphony, Boise Philharmonic, and Shenzhen Symphony orchestras. In addition to the traditional repertoire canon, her current season also features lesser-known works by composers such as Leroy Anderson, Florence Price, Clara Schumann, and Xiaogang Ye.

Deeply committed to sharing her joy for music and connecting with communities, Fei-Fei also engages students and community audiences through frequent outreach concerts and master classes. Activities from her current season include two special residencies with her Aletheia Piano Trio at the Oberlin Conservatory, Texas Christian University, and masterclasses at Idaho State University, Utah State University, and Bakersfield College.

Fei-Fei was showcased prominently in the documentary film about the Cliburn Competition, *Virtuosity*, which premiered on PBS in 2015. Born in Shenzhen, she began piano lessons at the age of 5. She is a graduate of the Juilliard School where she studied with Dr. Yoheved Kaplinsky and is currently pursuing her Doctorate of Musical Arts with pianist Yefim Bronfman at Manhattan School of Music. Fei-Fei is also a member of the piano faculty at John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University and serves as Bronfman's teaching associate at MSM.

ABOUT MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Founded as a community music school by Janet Daniels Schenck in 1918, today MSM is recognized for its more than 1,000 superbly talented undergraduate and graduate students who come from more than 50 countries and nearly all 50 states; its innovative curricula and world-renowned artist-teacher faculty that includes musicians from the New York Philharmonic, the Met Orchestra, and the top ranks of the jazz and Broadway communities; and a distinguished community of accomplished, award-winning alumni working at the highest levels of the musical, educational, cultural, and professional worlds.

The School is dedicated to the personal, artistic, and intellectual development of aspiring musicians, from its Precollege students through those pursuing doctoral studies. Offering classical, jazz, and musical theatre training, MSM grants a range of undergraduate and graduate degrees. True to MSM's origins as a music school for children, the Precollege Division is a highly competitive and professionally oriented Saturday music program, dedicated to the musical and personal growth of talented young musicians ages 5 to 18. The School also serves some 2,000 New York City schoolchildren through its Arts-in-Education Program, and another 2,000 students through its critically acclaimed Distance Learning Program.

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Land Acknowledgment

We want to acknowledge that we gather as Manhattan School of Music on the traditional land of the Lenape and Wappinger past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit as well.



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