

November 8, 2018 at 7:30pm | **Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall**

First concert in the
CROSSROADS SERIES
a new series that draws musicians
and music from around the globe to
tell stories and spark conversation

WU FEI

Guzheng

ABIGAIL WASHBURN

Banjo

Tonight's program will be announced
from the stage by the artists.

The concert will last approximately ninety minutes
and will have no intermission.

About the Program

Wu Fei's and Abigail Washburn's duo project is as unlikely, perhaps, as it was inevitable—a manifest sonic consequence of politics and vibrations commingling across continents. There is a directness in the musical duo format that makes it such a good vehicle for melodic conversations between close friends who obviously listen to each other with an athletic respect matched by their respective virtuosity.

Abigail Washburn, daughter of idealistic, hardworking Midwestern parents from Evanston, IL wasn't particularly musical as a child—that would come later. As a young girl in Beijing, Wu Fei was a musical prodigy, fast-tracked to be one of the very best musicians in a country of over a billion people. Abigail expected to become a lawyer with the goal of bettering U.S.-China relations. Fei was to become a professional musician performing state-sanctioned works in austere settings. But both women chose a fork in the road. Abigail has improved U.S.-China relations with a banjo not with a briefcase, touring the world and releasing a number of records that mingle Appalachian and Chinese

folk music. Wu Fei became a guzheng master and multilingual composer of her own works, assimilating avant-garde classical and folk music from around the world while retaining her own voice. Her time in the United States studying free improvisation led her to Boulder, CO where she would discover bluegrass music and meet Abigail.

Their duo is a musical resolution to their specific and differing issues about home. For Fei, it means an opportunity to assimilate elements of her musical argot—Chinese classical, folk, and opera—into song forms, while leaving room for the free associative tendencies she developed in the practice of free improvisation. In short, it marks a return to a thrown-out rule book with a changed perspective. For Abigail, it means musical collaboration with a “sister from another mister” who speaks all the same languages—someone with whom she can create brave, intimate music.

For the listener, it means a gift of unhurried music drawn freely from streams of raised consciousness, waves which met from halfway across the world to find they shared the same shake.

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14 Feb,
2019 7:30pm

“8980: BOOK OF TRAVELERS”
Gabriel Kahane, Singer-Songwriter

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Avi Avital, Mandolin | Omer Avital, Bass
Yonathan Avishai, Piano | Itamar Doari, Percussion

For tickets and more information visit princetonuniversityconcerts.org

About the Artists



Wu Fei Guzheng
Abigail Washburn Banjo

WU FEI, Guzheng

This concert marks Wu Fei's Princeton University Concerts debut.

Wu Fei is a native of Beijing and a current Nashville resident. She is a classically trained composer, master of the guzheng—the 21-string Chinese zither—and a vocalist. She plays in the guzheng's vernacular—a musical language which is at least 2,000 years old—and mixes Western classical and Chinese traditions with a contemporary, idiosyncratic sound. Her early music education was at the China Conservatory of Music, but she did her Master's at Mills College and later immersed herself in the New York City downtown improvisation scene at venues like The Stone, where Fei has frequently performed and curated.

Wu Fei composes for choir, string quartet, chamber ensemble, Balinese gamelan, and orchestra; her commissions range from

a composition for Percussions Claviers de Lyon that premiered in the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing to live performances in Paris and Tokyo for luxury brand Hermès. Currently, Wu Fei is the composer-in-residence for Chatterbird Ensemble. She has also been commissioned by Intersection Ensemble and individual soloists globally.

In addition to her own original compositions, Fei has collaborated with many artists of different disciplines and genres, ranging from Béla Fleck, Abigail Washburn, drummer Billy Martin (Medeski-Martin-Wood) to avant-garde composers John Zorn and Fred Frith. She has taken her guzheng and music around the world, and touring highlights include composition premieres at the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing, the MoMA in New York City, North Sea Jazz Festival in The Netherlands, Vossa Jazz in Norway, Europalia Festival in Belgium, and the Big Ears Festival in Tennessee.

Wu Fei has released two solo records and one duo record with classical guitarist Gyan Riley. Each record exhibits both her unique solo improvisational vocabulary and her craft of composing for chamber orchestras. “Wu’s work evinces respect for tradition, an interest in what instruments can do, a strong sense of architecture, and good old-fashioned showmanship.” More information about Wu Fei can be found at www.wufeimusic.com.

More than
2,000 years old,
the 21-string
guzheng became
prominent during
the Qin Dynasty
(221 to 206 BCE),
and by the Tang
Dynasty (618 CE
to 907 CE) it was
arguably the most
commonly played
instrument in
China.

ABIGAIL WASHBURN, Banjo

Abigail Washburn first appeared on our series with Béla Fleck in the 2016–2017 season. This is her second appearance at Princeton University Concerts.

If American old-time music is about taking earlier, simpler ways of life and music-making as one's model, Abigail Washburn has proven herself to be a bracing revelation to that tradition. She—a singing, songwriting, Illinois-born, Nashville-based clawhammer banjo player—is every bit as interested in the present and the future as she is in the past and every bit as attuned to the global as she is to the local. Abigail pairs venerable folk elements with far-flung sounds, and the results feel both strangely familiar and unlike anything anybody's ever heard before.

One fateful day more than a decade ago, Washburn was miraculously offered a record deal in the halls of a bluegrass convention in Kentucky which changed her trajectory from becoming a lawyer in China to a traveling folk musician. Since then, Abigail has been recording and touring a continuous stream of music. Her music ranges from the “all-g’earl” string band sound of Uncle Earl to her bilingual solo release *Song of the Traveling Daughter* (2005), to the mind-bending “chamber roots” sound of the Sparrow Quartet, to the rhythms, sounds and stories of *Afterquake*, her fundraiser CD for the Sichuan earthquake victims. *The New York Times* praised her 2011 release, *City of Refuge*, written with collaborator, composer Kai Welch, saying the songs “mingle Appalachia and folk-pop, with

tinges of Asia and Bruce Springsteen.” Her most recent release, *Echo in the Valley* (2017), was recorded with her husband, 15-time Grammy award winning banjo virtuoso, Béla Fleck. *Echo in the Valley* is the follow up to Béla and Abigail's acclaimed, self-titled debut that earned the 2016 Grammy for Best Folk Album.

Having toured the world, Washburn is also armed with Chinese language ability and profound connections to culture and people on the other side of the Pacific. Washburn is one of the few foreign artists currently touring China independently and regularly. She completed a tour in 2011 of China's Silk Road supported by grants from the U.S. Embassy, Beijing. Abigail, along with 24 other innovative and creative thinkers worldwide, was named a TED fellow and gave a talk at the 2012 TED Convention in Long Beach, CA about building U.S.-China relations through music. In March of 2013, she was commissioned by New York Voices and The Public Theater to write and debut a theatrical work titled, *Post-American Girl*, which draws from her 17-year relationship with China and addresses themes of expanding identity, cultural relativism, pilgrimage, the universal appeal of music and opening the heart big enough to fold it all in. Abigail was recently named the first U.S.-China Fellow at Vanderbilt University. Her efforts to share U.S. music in China and Chinese music in the U.S. exist within a hope that cultural understanding and the communal experience of beauty and sound rooted in tradition will lead the way to a richer existence. More information about Abigail Washburn can be found at www.abigailwashburn.com.

Celebrating



**YEARS
OF MUSIC
MAKING**
2018-2019 SEASON

Anniversaries are often a time for looking back on all that has come before. And with 125 years of presenting the world's greatest musicians—from cellist Yo-Yo Ma to violinist Isaac Stern, the Budapest String Quartet to contralto Marian Anderson, pianist Vladimir Horowitz to pianist Dame Myra Hess—there can be no doubt that Princeton University Concerts has made an immeasurable impact on the history of classical music.

But as we celebrate our 125th season, we choose to look toward the future.

Toward musical luminaries who transcend genre, bringing us to the very heart of music.

Toward an ever-evolving concert experience—from the focused intensity of Performances Up Close, to the transformative connectedness of Live Music Meditations—within the incredible intimacy of Richardson Auditorium and beyond.

Toward reshaping our musical canon through commissions, interdisciplinary initiatives, and reveling in the unexpected.

It will be a year-long celebration of our commitment to redefining how classical music is presented and experienced and striving to introduce ever broader audiences to the most gloriously life-affirming music that the world has to offer.

This is just the beginning...

SUPPORT US

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Other support comes from donors like you. We are grateful to the individuals whose support at all levels ensures that the musical performance remains a vital part of Princeton, the community, and the region.

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