



COLBURN COLLECTION

STORYTELLERS
HIGDON, HARBISON, IVES
TRIO
AZURA



MENU

A NOTE FROM THE ARTISTS

STORYTELLERS

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**SPECIAL THANKS
& CREDITS**

TRACK LIST

A NOTE FROM THE ARTISTS

Since meeting as students at the Colburn Conservatory of Music and forming Trio Azura in 2022, we have had the privilege of performing a varied repertoire of beautiful compositions. But the three pieces chosen for this album hold a special meaning for us. What ties the album together is the narrative and imagery in each piece: Jennifer Higdon created a new vision of sound, depicting colors through music with her Piano Trio, while each of the movements in John Harbison's Piano Trio No. 2 conveys a short story. Charles Ives's Piano Trio was a departure from the Germanic Romantic music which is such a staple of the repertoire, and gave us a chance to explore different ways of interacting and communicating with each other to deliver new sounds. It is a very technically challenging piece that is also immensely rewarding to perform. As a chamber music trio, we've grown with all of these pieces.

While we are accustomed to performing together live, recording was a new, demanding, and rewarding experience for us. Over two days, we gained valuable insight into the recording process and what it takes to sustain the intensity of live performance in the studio. It pushed all of us to be more intentional with our musical decisions in order to feel unified.

Listening through all the takes was both humbling and a tremendous source of pride. We were extremely lucky to have Fabio Bidini and Jonathan Brown, members of the Colburn faculty, producing this project. They offered guidance and helped us stay positive. We could not have done this album without their help or the support of the Colburn School, especially audio engineers Francesco Perlangeli and Sergey Parfenov. We're also grateful to the Colburn School faculty and staff for being an absolutely integral part of Trio Azura's journey and supporting us along the way. We've each had amazing mentors who shaped our artistic view and helped us grow as musicians.

As the Colburn School's Chamber Ensemble-in-Residence for the 2025–2027 academic years, we look forward to exploring new opportunities, sharing music with audiences, and teaching young people about composers' stories. Experiences like these are among the most rewarding parts of being artists, and we're excited for what lies ahead.

STORYTELLERS

Born in Brooklyn, raised in Georgia and Tennessee, and trained at the Curtis Institute and the University of Pennsylvania, Jennifer Higdon is celebrated for her colorful orchestral music – including her Violin Concerto, for which she earned the 2010 Pulitzer Prize, and GRAMMY®-winning concertos for percussion, viola, and harp. But Higdon is just as much at home in the realm of chamber music, and her many works for smaller ensembles often feature the keyboard. Her several works that also incorporate violin and cello include the Piano Trio, aptly though less fancifully titled than many of Higdon's works. Indeed, Higdon saved the evocative naming for the two movements themselves. In the initial one, "Pale Yellow," the cello, and then the violin, join the hymnlike piano introduction, and a cooperative conversation, complete with soaring melodies and a central climax, ensues among the three instruments. In contrast to the gradual build and release of "Pale Yellow," the second movement, "Fiery Red," launches immediately into mischievously fast figurations, swirling nearly without relief to a frenzied and bright conclusion. Higdon's Piano Trio has a close connection with another work for the same combination; *Color Through*, a kind of

companion piece to the Piano Trio, contains "Wondrous White" and "Brilliant Blue," and any of the four movements may be performed together.

John Harbison's Piano Trio No. 2, "Short Stories," marks its composer's return to the genre after more than three decades. Like Higdon, Harbison is fluent in writing for large and small ensembles, and his second trio also contains evocative movement titles. The first, "Tale," suggests just that: a story told, or at least starting to be told, through music. As Harbison described it, "a melody, the subject of the tale, could certainly develop and continue, instead is interrupted, questioned, then gently displaced so that the thread could be picked up more truthfully later on." Harbison wrote of his second movement, "Ballad," that "something bardic, ritualistic, and lapidary is happening." Broken piano chords underpin searching string material, but the musical interplay soon turns more confrontational. Of the third movement, "Rumors and Reports," Harbison wrote, "What starts as an insinuation, under the breath, evolves, by inexact association and translation, into something quite assertive." Indeed, a quiet, speechlike oscillating melody at the start kicks off a discussion that intensifies

toward a feverish peak before a brief, ethereal conclusion. In the finale, “Enigma,” attempts at longer-flowing melodies ultimately give way to mysterious sonic digressions, including a set of unsettling repeated notes at the end.

In its playfulness and invention, Charles Ives’s Piano Trio is an early-20th-century forerunner to the trios of Higdon and Harbison, as all three evoke a sense of storytelling and conversation. Ives was well enmeshed in the life insurance business by the time he composed this work, but it points back in various ways to his days as a student at Yale University. Ives later wrote of the first movement that it “recalled a rather short but serious talk . . . by an old professor of Philosophy”; it opens with an extended duet for cello and piano, followed by one for violin and piano, before all three instruments are finally sounded together; the material is mostly ruminative but is, at times, dancelike. Rhythmic momentum and some pointed dissonance toward the close yield to a surprisingly grounded final chord. The raucously energetic second movement, “TSIAJ” (“This Scherzo Is a Joke”), begins with a disorienting introduction and then erupts into Ives’s take on the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity song “A Band of Brothers from DKE.” The distortion and juxtaposition

of quotations of popular material constitute one of Ives’s chief techniques throughout his oeuvre, and among the many other songs featured – or renovated – in this movement are Stephen Foster’s “My Old Kentucky Home,” the traditional tune “Sailor’s Hornpipe,” and the Protestant hymn “There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood.”

To close the movement, a slow, seemingly delicate coda suddenly bursts with energy, leading to the expansive third movement, a resplendent finale that serves as the piece’s center of gravity. A forceful introduction leads to a quotation of his own earlier song, “The All-Enduring,” which he composed while at Yale. Moments of rhythmic intensity throw into relief the aching, tender melodic writing of this song, which even includes an emotionally heightened turn figure. A quotation of the hymn “Rock of Ages” in the movement’s coda brings the work to a gentle and quiet – and, characteristically for Ives, ambiguous – end.

© Matthew Mugmon, 2026

Professor of Musicology
at the University of Arizona

TRIO AZURA

Trio Azura is quickly emerging as one of today's most promising young ensembles, characterized by "intelligence, imagination, and profound emotion" (*Gramophone*). Formed in 2022 at the Colburn School, the ensemble currently serves as Ensemble-in-Residence, where its members study with Jonathan Brown, Martin Beaver, Clive Greensmith, and Fabio Bidini. Most recently, Trio Azura was named a winner of the Young Concert Artists Susan Wadsworth International Auditions and appointed YCA Jacobs Fellows, becoming the organization's first Ensemble-in-Residence.

The trio brings together Canadian violinist Duncan McDougall, South Korean cellist Yejin Hong, and Chinese pianist Yanfeng (Tony) Bai. Drawing on diverse cultural backgrounds, the ensemble unites distinctive artistic perspectives with a shared commitment to expressive depth, clarity of interpretation, and collaborative spirit.

In 2024, Trio Azura garnered international recognition at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, receiving the Grand Prize, Gold Medal, Lift Every Voice Prize, and the Horszowski Trio Prize. The ensemble has also been recognized at the Schoenfeld International String Competition in Harbin, China.

Trio Azura has performed widely throughout the United States and internationally, with appearances in Italy, Belgium, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Australia, and China. The ensemble's other performances include recital debuts at Carnegie Hall and Merkin Hall.

Committed to the role of music beyond the stage, Trio Azura is equally dedicated to education and community engagement. The ensemble has led masterclasses, workshops, and mentorship programs for more than 2,000 students across the United States, reflecting their belief in the transformative power of chamber music to inspire and connect communities.

*We would like to express
our deepest gratitude to our mentors
Jonathan Brown, Martin Beaver,
Clive Greensmith, and Fabio Bidini
for their inspiration and wisdom;

to our audio engineers Francesco Perlangeli
and Sergey Parfenov for their expertise
and attention to detail;

to the Colburn School for their support
and facilitation of this project;

and to our audience for listening openly,
from wherever you may be.*

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Producers

Fabio Bidini, Jonathan Brown, Nick Gianopoulos

Engineers

Francesco Perlangeli, Sergey Parfenov

Mastering engineer

Sergey Parfenov

Piano technicians

Neema Pazargad, Chris McKelway

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and Nick Gianopoulos*

outthere
M U S I C



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[BACK TO MENU](#)

STORYTELLERS

TRIO AZURA

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Duncan McDougall
violin

Yejin Hong
cello

Yanfeng (Tony) Bai
piano

Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)

Piano Trio (2003)

- | | | |
|---|-------------|------|
| 1 | Pale Yellow | 8:48 |
| 2 | Fiery Red | 5:54 |

John Harbison (b. 1938)

Piano Trio No. 2 “Short Stories” (2003)

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|------|
| 3 | Tale | 6:35 |
| 4 | Ballad | 4:07 |
| 5 | Rumors and Reports | 4:25 |
| 6 | Enigma | 4:43 |

Charles Ives (1874 – 1954)

Piano Trio (1904–11; rev. 1914–15)

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 7 | Moderato | 5:08 |
| 8 | TSIAJ (“This Scherzo Is a Joke”): Presto | 6:16 |
| 9 | Moderato con moto | 12:27 |

Total Running Time	58:00
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