

of a single melodic line that imitates jazz solos, becoming more rhythmically agitated until the theme itself finally appears, culminating with a playful ending.

Praised for his artistry—described as having “the most sensitive touch on the piano” and “the rigueur, passion, and discipline of an old Samurai”—**pianist Nariaki Sugiura** has established himself as an international concert artist and educator. He has performed across the United States, Europe, South America, and Asia, appearing at venues such as Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Shenzhen Symphony Hall, Liszt Academy Recital Hall, Palazzo Taffini, Mannheim Baroque Palace, and Kioi Hall. As soloist, he has appeared with orchestras including the Greater Grand Forks Symphony, Bismarck-Mandan Symphony, and University of Antioquia Symphony. A versatile collaborator, he has performed with Astrid Schween, Laszlo Varga, Anthony Ross, Csaba Onczay, Federico Agostini, and Emilio Colón.

Deeply committed to cultural exchange and community engagement, Dr. Sugiura founded the *Red River Trio Project*, strengthening ties between Grand Forks and its Friendship City, Kanuma (Japan), where he was named cultural ambassador in 2015. With his wife, cellist Simona Barbu, he co-founded the *Warsaw Summer Music Academy* (Indiana) and *Medora Music Academy* (North Dakota). Their newest initiative, *Harmonies for Peace*, brings classical music to underserved communities and earned Duo Cantabile recognition in 2025 as **Joyce and Aquel Ahmad Endowed Scholars for the Promotion of Peace and Nonviolence**. A Yamaha Artist, Dr. Sugiura has released nine albums on Klavier, Centaur, and Albany labels. He is Professor and Piano Area Coordinator at the **University of North Dakota**, where he inspires the next generation of musicians through performance, teaching, and cross-cultural collaboration.

Unbound: American Piano Music for the Left Hand
Nariaki Sugiura, piano

1	Adam Brackman: Prelude for the Left Hand	(3:57)
2	Bruce Stark: Nocturne for Left Hand Piano	(5:09)
	Alejandro Drago: Visions of Healing for Piano Left Hand	(13:45)
3	Little Bear, All is Well	4:51
4	Blue Jay, Come Sit by Me	4:44
5	The Eagle Loves You	5:10
	Christopher Gable: Five Words for Peace	(18:11)
6	Shalom	5:00
7	Mir	2:08
8	Frieden	3:13
9	Heiwa	4:58
10	La Paix	2:52
	Bruce Stark: If Stars Could Speak: 8 Piano Pieces for Left Hand Piano	(22:04)
11	If Stars Could Speak	2:38
12	Wind Chimes	2:21
13	Groove	3:28
14	Like Leaves in the Wind	1:58
15	To the Late Night	2:56
16	Music Box Dreams	2:39
17	Lyric Flow	3:51
18	Blues	3:04
19	Michael Wittgraf: Of Islands: Theme and Nine Variations on a Caribbean Folk Tune	(9:15)
	Total time:	74:17

Recorded: March 31, 2025 at Yamaha Artist Services, New York, NY. Produced by Steve Kaul. Engineered by Aaron Ross. All the pieces were recorded on Yamaha DS7X at Popplers Music in Grand Forks, ND in December 2024, January and March 2025. Then it was played on Yamaha DCFX at Yamaha Artist Services in NYC, NY. The recording project was supported through the Fine Arts and Humanities Initiative provided by the College of Arts and Science at University of North Dakota. Cover image: *America* by Kensei Dinu Sugiura.



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Unbound:
 American Piano Music for the Left Hand
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Adam Brackman:
Prelude for Left Hand

By writing this prelude, I embraced a new challenge in my compositional journey. Writing for just the left hand took thinking outside of the box to keep my specific style intact whilst making a piece that I still found memorable. This piece was something that helped me in my most recent project and gave me valuable experience. I wanted to write something both gentle and powerful, and I found the challenge an enjoyable experience and something that helped me grow as a composer.

Bruce Stark:
Nocturne for Left Hand Piano

Nocturne for Left Hand Piano was composed during the spring of 2021 for a commission by my long-time friend and wonderful pianist Nariaki Sugiura. It begins rather introspectively with arpeggios spanning a wide range, and blossoms into more expressive, active passages before returning to a quiet

ending. The image of night—and all that awakens with the coming of it—inspires the music. Ideas flow freely into each other in a dream-like continuum, and an atmosphere of improvisation.

Alejandro Drago: Visions of Healing

In fall 2023, I received a commission from my colleague, pianist Nariaki Sugiura, for a 10–12 minute work for piano left hand. Shortly after, we traveled together to the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota, where we performed in duo, visited the high school, and met with local educators and tribal leaders. During the drive, Dr. Sugiura shared his vision for a long-term project commissioning left-hand works, inspired by Paul Wittgenstein’s post–World War I commissions and rooted in the idea of healing after trauma.

Among many meaningful encounters at the reservation, one stands out: a meeting with a local drummer, his son, and another young man. They introduced us to tradi-

tional songs sung in ritual and daily life. The intensity of this moment convinced me that some traditions must remain oral, and that conventional concert formats cannot fully carry their message. The drummer’s repeated reference to these songs as “healing,” even lullabies, struck me deeply.

Initially, I drafted ideas centered on war imagery but soon realized my true focus should be healing. This revelation inspired *Visions of Healing*, a cycle of three short pieces whose titles echo the songs shared with us. Rather than quoting or imitating Indigenous music, they are musical representations of my own internal experiences, shaped by the songs and the drummer’s profound explanations of their spiritual and cultural meaning.

Christopher Gable:
Five Words for Peace

The first movement, “Shalom/Salaam,” is referring to the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict. I list both words in the title

because both sound very similar to each other, even though they seem different. The central section of this movement is based on the maqsum Middle Eastern rhythmic mode. The last section represents a difficult coexistence of the two musical ideas.

“Mir” is Russian for “peace,” but also the word for “world.” I like the idea that we could achieve world peace through etymology: just use the same word!

“Frieden” refers to a German/Austrian waltz, which is a peace-time activity of togetherness.

“Heiwa” in Japanese also means harmony. This fits the outer sections, which are supposed to represent a peaceful Zen Garden; harmony in oneself, and harmony in nature. The central section is music of striving for peace, which is not easy. It takes a lot of work.

“La Paix” is inspired by a movement from one of Bach’s French suites. In those

suites, the final movement is a Gigue, a lively dance in compound meter. People all over the world hope that one day, we will dance for joy and peace.

Bruce Stark:
If Stars Could Speak

If Stars Could Speak is a collection of 8 pieces for left hand piano, commissioned by Nariaki Sugiura. When I first began composing this music, I felt terribly constrained. However, after spending many hours exploring the keyboard with my left hand, I began seeing it as a different instrument, with charms and musical attributes of its own. The pieces span a variety of character, from brief, poetic vignettes (*If Stars Could Speak*, *Wind Chimes*, *Music Box Dreams*) to flowing, lyrical pieces (*Like Leaves in the Wind*, *Lyric Flow*) to jazz-inspired compositions (*Groove*, *To the Late Night*, *Blues*).

I feel a special debt of gratitude to Nariaki Sugiura for his initiative in

commissioning this piece; it gave me an opportunity to explore new musical territory while offering repertory to a unique group of musicians. Igor Stravinsky once said “The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees oneself of the chains that shackle the spirit.” This project brought challenges, discoveries, and many new perspectives.

Michael Wittgraf: Of Islands

Of Islands for piano left hand was composed in 2021 for my friend Nariaki Sugiura. It is a set of nine variations on a Caribbean folk tune. The version used here is often referred to as the tune “St. Thomas”, made famous by the jazz saxophonist Sonny Rollins. In a set of variations, the theme is usually presented first. In this case it is presented last, with nine variations preceding it. It begins with a rhapsodic introduction immediately followed by a rhapsodic variation. Variations 2 through 7 are an increasingly complex set that incorporate increasingly complex jazz harmonies. Variations 8 and 9 consist