

For Immediate Release



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**Ballets Russes Arts Initiative to Present World Premiere
Orchestration of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel Sonata**

Hensel's Piano Sonata in G Minor, arranged by Patricia Wallinga, to be performed in Boston by 26-piece orchestra with pianist Sharon Su in June, alongside other works by women composers.

BOSTON—April 28, 2023—Ballets Russes Arts Initiative (BRAI) has commissioned San Francisco-based composer Patricia Wallinga to orchestrate a piano solo piece by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel into a concerto for piano and orchestra. Pianist Sharon Su will premiere Wallinga's arrangement of Hensel's *Piano Sonata in G Minor* at a BRAI concert that also features women composers such as Joan Tower and Lera Auerbach.

As a woman in the Romantic era, virtuoso pianist and composer Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel had considerably fewer opportunities to write large-scale music than her younger brother, Felix. Though prolific (460 compositions before her death at age 41), Hensel's output was smaller in scale by necessity, as she was discouraged from having a public music career. She faced skepticism even within her own family. Her father once wrote to her that "Music will perhaps become Felix's profession. For you it can and must be only an ornament."

BRAI is organizing a consortium of ensembles around the country in commissioning this piece, led by executive director Anna Winestein and director of community engagement Andrés Ballesteros. "This project celebrates Hensel by giving her a concerto in the classical canon 175 years after her death," said Winestein. "It also calls attention to how women and marginalized people have always composed, even in environments where they were disempowered and their talents dismissed."

Su and Wallinga initiated this idea when they realized how distinctive this sonata was in Hensel's oeuvre, finding in it "a wealth of deliberate orchestral writing." Wallinga, whose compositions have earned praise as "powerful" (Bloomington Herald-Times) and "damn brilliant" (conductor and composer Eric Whitacre), pointed out that the piece has "similarities to Felix's *Piano Concerto [in G Minor]* striking in light of their close collaboration and frequent exchange of ideas." Su, a pianist and music writer known for performing, recording, and premiering a wide-ranging repertoire of historical and contemporary composers, is working closely with Wallinga to write the cadenzas.

The arrangement will premiere on June 15 at 7:30pm at Congregation Kehillath, 384 Harvard St., Brookline, MA 02446. Tickets will be available online in early May. Ensembles interested in joining the consortium can learn more at www.ballets-russes.com/FMH.html. The premiere is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, the Women's Philharmonic Advocacy, the Rebecca Clarke Society, Inc., and an anonymous donor.

About Ballets Russes Arts Initiative:

Ballets Russes Arts Initiative is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization that fosters creative exchange and projects in the visual and performing arts and film. The organization was inspired by the example of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, an international performing company that toured Europe and the US between 1909 and 1929, bringing together creatives from Eastern and Western Europe and even the US to create innovative and impactful productions that revolutionized dance, music, visual art and film. BRAI presents collaborative, creative, and educational programming by building institutional partnerships with museums, performing companies, universities, and individual art-makers. One of its areas of focus has been on the post-Soviet States and Eastern Europe (which we describe together as Eurasia). Based in Boston, Massachusetts, it carries out public programming and outreach events throughout Massachusetts, New England and the East Coast, as well as internationally.

About Congregation Kehillath Israel:

Congregation Kehillath Israel is a traditional inclusive synagogue that actively embraces individuals, its community, and the world. An innovative and prominent voice in North American Jewish life since 1917, it also hosts extensive cultural and arts programming in its state of the art campus, renovated in 2018.

About Patricia Wallinga:

San Francisco-based composer and mezzo-soprano Patricia Wallinga is known for her intricate, charismatic music. Wallinga engages with traditions from literature, dance, theater, and folk music alongside influences from the classical canon. Her work has earned praise as "powerful" (Bloomington Herald-Times) and "damn brilliant" (conductor and composer Eric Whitacre). Wallinga's accolades include the American Prize, the BMI Student Composer Award, and a fellowship at the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music. Originally from Naperville, Illinois, Wallinga holds degrees from Indiana University and San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

About Sharon Su:

Sharon Su is a pianist and music writer known for performing, recording, and premiering a wide-ranging repertoire of historical and contemporary composers. Music critic Anne Midgette has called her writing "illuminating," and Su's recent features include the LA Times, SF Chronicle, and VAN Magazine. Her recordings of works by Clara Schumann, Cécile Chaminade, and Louise Farrenc have received praise and been featured on classical radio programming. Ms. Su studied with Yoshikazu Nagai, Gideon Rubin, Frank Wiens, Rex Cooper, and Marina Grudskaya. She has also been advised by celebrated concert artists Joanne Polk, Ian Jones, Inna Falijs, Stephen Spooner, Chun-Chieh Yen, Hong Xu, Enrico Elisi, James Giles, and Luiz de Moura Castro.