

A DUO Recital

FIVE YEARS
OF FRIENDSHIP
IN THE MAKING

GABRIEL KAHANE
& TIMO ANDRES

William Robin

“This is like from ‘When Harry Met Sally,’” Gabriel Kahane says. Sitting beside his fellow composer Timo Andres at a table in a corner park in Brooklyn on a beautiful fall afternoon, Kahane recalls the origins of their friendship. “And *he* was going to rehearse the Ligeti Horn Trio, and *I* was going to rehearse...” Kahane trails off, jokily impersonating an elderly man reminiscing about a high school sweetheart.

When they first met back in 2010, Kahane and Andres were both budding composers in their 20s but already carrying impressive musical credentials. Kahane had released his first record of songs, for which he sang and played piano, banjo, and guitar and was joined by the likes of Chris Thile and Sufjan Stevens. Having completed graduate school in composition at Yale University and recently moved to New York, Andres was gigging as a pianist and had already recorded an acclaimed album of his compositions for the label Nonesuch. Kahane sought to commission a group of composers for an upcoming performance and stumbled across Andres’s music online. They met in a now-defunct café in the quiet, leafy neighborhood of Ditmas Park in Brooklyn and hit it off. The culmination of that five-year friendship can be heard in Chapel Hill in April, when Andres and Kahane will perform an intimate recital at Memorial Hall. Both composers will play piano, and Kahane will sing, highlighting musical favorites as well as premiering new works that they have written for each other.

Since 2010, each composer has also grown to occupy a prominent position in the world of contemporary music. Kahane has crafted elaborate theatrical spectacles that double as pop albums, such as *The Ambassador*, a meditation on Los Angeles that premiered at



PHOTO BY JOSH GOLEMAN

Memorial Hall last season. Andres has written works for esteemed performers such as the Takács Quartet, collaborated with Philip Glass, and performed as a pianist with the North Carolina Symphony. But even as they cross numerous artistic boundaries, Andres and Kahane also exhibit a deep reverence for the musical canon. Their recital will place in dialogue Bach and Britten, Charles Ives and Jerome Kern, Thomas Adès and Andrew Norman. “I do like to do the thing of throwing the old and new all together and making a sort of salad program,” Andres says. “To me, those things are constantly shining light on each other in interesting ways; it helps you to hear them differently.”

The pair cite the freely associative realm of the mixtape as a model, but their century-spanning program also represents a vital grasping for context in our heterogeneous present. “We feel ourselves sitting on this pile of music history a lot, maybe more than some of our contemporaries,” Andres adds. “There’s an eagerness to reconcile that, or acknowledge it in some way, or incorporate it.” For Kahane, the recital’s transition from Schubert’s G-flat impromptu to his own song “Where Are the Arms” heightens and frames the melancholy of each work. “I find it can be really overwhelming, faced with the multiplicity of voices and streams and traditions, to just put something out into the world in the absence of context,” he says. ▶



PHOTO BY MICHAEL WILSON

A DUO RECITAL

That engagement with tradition harkens back to their first, informal experiences making music together — Andres mentions a tipsy evening in which Kahane accompanied Schubert's *lieder* on the banjo. In 2011, Kahane and Andres mounted their first attempt at a duo concert that would incorporate their own music, that of their contemporaries, and selections from the canon. It took a disastrous turn. "We were both sick, it was a terrible concert, and no one came," Kahane says. "It was a qualified fiasco," Andres replies. "There was something good in there." They continued to hone the concept over several years; this spring's coming performances, which will arrive at Carnegie Hall two days before they reach Chapel Hill, represent the result of a deepened musical friendship. "It's one of my favorite ways of making music, which is just by hanging out," Andres says. "You just hang out for a while and figure out what you like." Each composer will perform a work written for him by the other. Andres was recently preoccupied with finding the right poem for Kahane, and their collaborative relationship strengthened his approach; he felt confident in "the ability to read a text and be like, 'Can I imagine Gabe saying this or singing this?' It's very easy for me to say, 'This'll work, this won't work.'"

Towards the end of a wide-ranging conversation — which addressed, among other topics, how to properly box up leftover

food and the unhealthy cultural fixation on youth today — the sun begins to set and the composers turn towards discussing what they admire in each other's work. Kahane and Andres might represent ideal artistic partners: They have a shared sense of priorities, but radically different personalities. Introspective and detached, Andres creates music that is emotive in its intricacy; Kahane's work, though often couched in explorations of history, wears its heart on its sleeve. "Timo's an aesthete in a lot of ways," notes Kahane. "I am tormented in a way that Timo is not," he adds with a laugh, and then recalls a particularly spellbinding rendition of the Schubert impromptu that Andres gave several years ago. "I could see the extent to which it was a totally external experience for you, that was based around the beauty of the sound that you were making," Kahane says. "Your head was cocked such that you were just listening to make sure that you were making the most beautiful sound possible." Andres then reflects on Kahane's music: "Even when your songs are about something very abstract like aesthetics, it's all about your personal reaction to it — or at least that's what we feel when you're singing it." For those curious for a further glimpse into this longstanding musical friendship, Memorial Hall awaits on April 9. ■

William Robin is a PhD candidate in musicology at UNC.



global **FEST**
FRI MAR 4 / 8PM

NORTH CAROLINA
arts
COUNCIL

S26 SERIES '26

THE
CAROLINA
THEATRE
DOWNTOWN DURHAM

309 W MORGAN ST / 919.560.3030 / CAROLINATHEATRE.ORG