

**A DANTE ANDANTE:** Italian artist and violinist Leonardo Frigo's latest project, 'Infernus', marks the 700th anniversary of the death of Dante Alighieri: 33 violins and a cello are each decorated with images inspired by one canto from the poet's 'Inferno'. The project, which took Frigo four years to complete, will be on display at the Basilica Palladiana in Vicenza, Italy, until 31 August. Photos: courtesy Leonardo Frigo

## PREMIERE of the MONTH

# Force of nature

A work for string quartet and soprano marked by its organicism and link to nature

COMPOSER **Augusta Read Thomas**

WORK ***Upon Wings of Words*** for soprano and string quartet

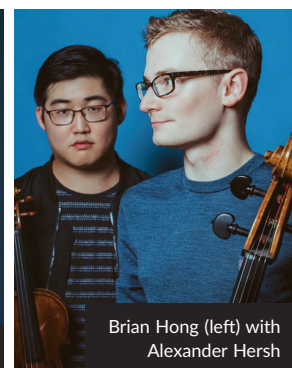
ARTISTS **Brian Hong, Benjamin Baker (violins) Jordan Bak (viola) Alexander Hersh (cello) Kristina Bachrach (soprano)**

DATE **9 September 2021**

PLACE **Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, IL, US** [bit.ly/3dNLWGr](https://bit.ly/3dNLWGr)



Augusta Read Thomas



Brian Hong (left) with Alexander Hersh

For American composer Augusta Read Thomas, it is nature that takes centre stage in *Upon Wings of Words* for soprano and string quartet. 'Like the butterfly effect, one small nuance at the beginning motivates and influences the rest of the composition,' she says. The piece was commissioned by Nexus Chamber Music, which stipulated the length and instrumentation. It was in the choice of libretto that Thomas found freedom, gravitating to a familiar source of inspiration: poet Emily Dickinson. 'I wanted a libretto that encompasses contrasting images, celebrates nature and has plenty of open vowels and alluring images,' she says. Her final choice included four poems: *Snow flakes*, *'Hope' is the thing with feathers*, *The Sea of Sunset* and *Tell all the truth but tell it slant*. It is on the wings of Dickinson's words that Thomas asked herself, 'Where can I fly with this?'

'This piece investigates various rhythmic syntaxes,' she explains. 'Each gets stronger by the juxtaposition of the others.' Together with a 'consistent harmonic vocabulary', this unites the contrasting poems musically. 'All five parts are fully engaged and take turns being the focal point upon which the others balance,' she says of the instrumentation. 'Everything is organic, one thing leads to the next and unexpected twists seem inevitable.' In setting the words to music, she takes different approaches to translate the songs' deeper meanings into new sounds. In the first movement, dance permeates everything from harmonies to rhythms. Of its poem, she says: 'It's so positive and full of natural imagery. I thought, "OK, we're dancing!"' The fourth-movement poem takes the 'hotness and power of truth' as its inspiration. 'In a way, I'm telling the whole piece's truth, but it's my own take on it, and it has its own fingerprint.'

READ THOMAS PHOTO: ANTHONY BARLICH; HONG/HERSH PHOTO: LAUREN DESBERG