

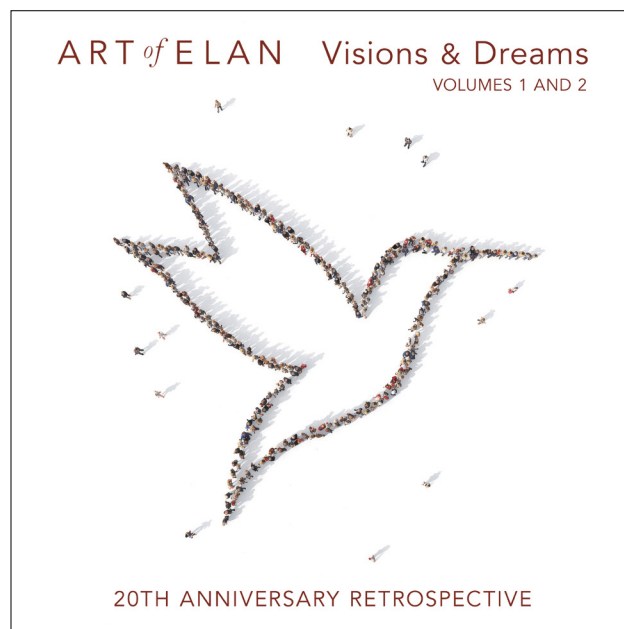
Art of Elan

Visions & Dreams

For nearly two decades, Art of Elan has reimagined what chamber music can be: not confined to the concert hall, but alive within galleries, museums, and shared civic spaces — places where sound becomes part of a larger cultural conversation. Since its founding in 2007, the San Diego-based arts group has cultivated a musical language rooted in collaboration, connection, and community, championing the voices of living composers and the stories they carry.

At its core is a simple but expansive idea: “our shared humanity is at the heart of everything we do,” explained Executive and Artistic Director Kate Hatmaker. That principle shapes not only how Art of Elan performs music, but also how it listens — across cultures, across disciplines, and across time.

Visions & Dreams marks a 20-year retrospective of that journey. It is not a catalog of the past, but a living document of relationships: between composers and performers, between audiences and spaces, between imagination and sound. The works gathered here span a wide emotional and stylistic terrain, yet they are united by a common thread: each piece reflects an act of imagination made tangible through sound. Together, they form a mosaic of voices — playful, searching, contemplative, and bold — that define the evolving identity of Art of Elan.



Each disc unfolds as a continuous and immersive experience, inviting audiences into a deeper mode of attention — what Hatmaker calls “intentional listening...not just these fleeting encounters.” But beyond listening, there is a larger invitation embedded in the album’s design.

“What I also hope the album can do is remind people to stay curious — about each other, about other cultures, about who we are as a civilization and what we are capable of.” Curiosity, in this sense, becomes an artistic and human practice — a way of engaging not only with music, but with the world.

The first volume opens in a spirit of invention and discovery. In Paul Wiancko’s *Toy Bricks*, music becomes an architecture of joy — small, interlocking gestures that evoke childhood imagination, where structure and spontaneity

coexist. As Hatmaker reflects, it is “such an uplifting piece...there’s something about the rhythmic impulse that really drives the music forward and makes you want to listen forward,” making it “a playful...way to start this...sonic journey.”

That sense of emergence continues in Chen Yi’s *Sprout*, a work born at a moment of personal and cultural renewal. Written after the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, it bridges musical worlds, allowing Eastern and Western traditions to meet not as opposites, but as reflections of one another. Hatmaker notes its vulnerability: “the whole opening is sort of spare, and you feel pretty vulnerable...with this very simple melody that gets spun out,” before it “launches into a more joyful...dance-like section.”

In Michael Oesterle’s *Parlour Games*, performers and listeners alike are invited into a space of play — where form itself becomes fluid, and music behaves like a deck of cards: shuffled, reimagined, and reshaped with each encounter. For Hatmaker, its appeal lies in both character and color: “it has playful moments and then more introspective moments...[through] its interesting instrument combination.”

Water, motion, and duality animate Reena Esmail’s *Nadiya*, where intersecting musical streams flow in tension and harmony. Drawing on Hindu ragas, the work becomes a meditation on coexistence — light and dark, structure and surprise, individuality and union. As Hatmaker describes, “it’s a very improvisatory work...the musicians actually determine how long it goes on, this conversation...” this is simply our contribution to it.

Then, unexpected timbres define new expressive landscapes. In Sarah Kirkland Snider’s *Shiner*, an unlikely ensemble reveals beauty in contrast — “finding beauty in unexpected places,” as Hatmaker notes. Meanwhile, Nahre Sol’s *Crossroads* captures a moment of decision — a musical threshold where paths diverge and converge — part of “a gorgeous sound world that’s transportive.”

The *Vjola Suite* by Ljova expands the album’s

geographic and rhythmic reach, weaving together global influences into dances that feel both rooted and invented. For Hatmaker, it remains “some of the most beloved music we’ve ever presented...this is the kind of stuff [audiences] want to hear over and over again,” bringing the first disc to a joyful close.

Taken together, these works form a kind of genesis: music as play, as experiment, as the first articulation of identity.

The second volume turns toward reflection — toward memory, landscape, and the passage of time — what Hatmaker describes as part of a broader arc, “a sonic experience...that allows for our listeners to experience a lot of different emotions.”

In Mason Bates’s *Life of Birds*, miniature forms become windows into fleeting narratives — each movement a study in motion, fragility, and survival. Across the album, Hatmaker was drawn to works that create contrast and dimension, asking “what’s going to open people’s ears...what mood are we trying to create...[that] asks people to listen in a different way.”

Celestial imagery shapes Juhi Bansal’s *Trail of Stars*, where repetition and gradual transformation mirror the slow arcs of light across the night sky. Time itself becomes audible, unfolding with a sense of spaciousness and reflection.

In Gabriela Ortiz’s *Exilios*, music gives voice to displacement and remembrance, honoring those whose lives were shaped by exile. The sound carries both the weight of history and the resilience of those who endure it — part of the album’s broader tapestry of global voices, what Hatmaker envisions as “a big patchwork quilt...that really stretches all the way around the globe.”

A more intimate reflection emerges in Jessie Montgomery’s *Peace*, written in the shadow of global uncertainty. Here, stillness is not the absence of emotion, but its reconciliation — a fragile equilibrium between sorrow and acceptance, reflecting what Hatmaker describes as

music's ability to "emotionally transport people somewhere" and connect them through shared experience.

Landscape and journey define *Island in the Sky* by Michi Wiancko, where vast geological time and human movement intersect, evoking erosion, distance, and the quiet persistence of natural forces.

Cycles of transformation animate Aftab Darvishi's *Daughters of Sol*, a work of shifting colors and gradual evolution — a sonic meditation on change, continuity, and return. As Hatmaker reflects, "Aftab's music...has a mysterious quality that invites us to lean in, to learn more, to listen more intently."

Finally, Kian Ravaei's *Family Photos* closes the album with a deeply personal lens. These musical snapshots — playful, nostalgic, and luminous — suggest that memory itself is a form of composition: fragments assembled into meaning, shaped by time and perspective.

Across both volumes, *Visions & Dreams* documents more than performances — it captures relationships. Many of the composers represented here are long-standing collaborators; many are performers themselves. With these works, the boundaries between creator and interpreter blur,

giving rise to a shared artistic language.

What unites these musical selections is not a single style, but a shared ethos. From its earliest days, Art of Elan has sought "to liberate classical music from a concert hall," expanding both the physical and conceptual spaces in which music lives.

What emerges is a constellation of voices — each distinct, yet connected through a commitment to exploration. These works do not seek to define the present moment so much as to inhabit it: to ask questions, to take risks, and to imagine new possibilities for sound and meaning.

The resulting diversity is not constructed — it emerges naturally from a process grounded in curiosity, collaboration, and care. As Hatmaker notes, the album reflects "an authentic expression of our values...inclusivity and building community."

That act of leaning in — of resisting passive listening — becomes central to the album's meaning. It asks something of us: attention, openness, and a willingness to encounter the unfamiliar.

According to Hatmaker, "That is a powerful exercise for what we can all do in the world right now."

Art of Elan

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Liner Notes

DISC 1

1. Toy Bricks

Paul Wiancko (b. 1983)

With a playful charm, Paul Wiancko's Toy Bricks captures innocence, whimsy, and pure joy, reminiscent of childhood play. Wiancko describes Toy Bricks as a "sweetly geometric summertime toe-tapper." Commissioned by the Methow Valley Chamber Music Festival, this piece received its premiere in 2012.

2. Sprout

Chen Yi (b. 1953)

Sprout was one of the first pieces she wrote upon admittance to China's Central Conservatory of Music, following the cultural revolution, and it manages to combine a Western writing style (and Western instruments) with the colors and folk melodies of her native China. "It was during that period," she recalls, "that I found my roots, my motherland, and really grew to appreciate the simple people on Earth. They spoke my native language, which I

soon discovered was directly connected to Chinese music. It made me listen to the Western musical language I had studied in an entirely different way.” Since coming to the United States in the mid 1980s, Chen Yi has become an increasingly compelling voice for the creation of music that blurs the lines between East and West, and that challenges traditional notions of folk and “classical” music.

3. Parlour Games

Michael Oesterle (b. 1968)

“Traditionally, parlour games involve logic or word play. They can involve skill in drawing or the dramatic arts, and while some of these games are more physical, they wouldn’t be considered a sport or exercise. Most do not require any equipment beyond what would be available in a typical parlor [room, traditional, formal sitting room]. The twelve pieces of ‘Parlour Games’ for cello and double bass are written to resemble games for the two instrumentalists and the listener. Although they offer a wide range of characters, moods, tempi, and expressions, they all share the idea of game play. In these pieces the listener may hear familiar musical formats such as nursery rhymes, lullabies, rondos, arias, counting songs, etc. The twelve pieces can be arranged like a deck of cards, shuffled and reordered to suit a particular occasion. Alternatively, they can be presented as a smaller combination of pieces. The title of each work may be a clue in presenting the pieces in a particular order, or in combinations of subsets.”

4. Nadiya

Reena Esmail (b. 1983)

“Nadiya” means ‘rivers’ in Hindi. In this work, I imagine two different streams intersecting — pushing and pulling against one another, tripping over each other, flowing into each other to create mellifluous, cascading melodies. The piece is in a composite of two Hindustani raags: Jog and Vachaspati — both have a light and a dark side, and they intermingle to create a luminous surface texture that twists and turns as it finds new points of resonance.”

5. Crossroads

Nahre Sol (b. 1991)

“Crossroads” was written in 2023 for pianist Tina Chong and it received its premiere by Art of Elan at The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park in San Diego in November 2023.

6. Shiner

Sarah Kirkland Snider (b. 1973)

“Shiner was written for an unlikely cast of characters: trombone, harp, viola, and marimba. It is about finding beauty in unexpected places.”

7. Vjola Suite

Ljova (b. 1978)

“The *Vjola Suite* [written in 2005-2008] is a collection of five short musical compositions in contrasting musical styles, heavily influenced by folk music from Eastern Europe, Cuba, Mali, and the Middle East. It is a collection of

lively dances, for which the steps have not yet been choreographed, and represent my attempt to fuse the rhythms of world music with the beautiful colors of a classical ensemble, to create a new kind of dance — elegant, entertaining, and somewhat asymmetrical. While none of the rhythms are genuinely traditional, they aspire to create a new sense of balance, enjoyment, and flight.”

“Bagel on the Malecon”: My favorite paradox of Cuban music is that the bass is never on the beat, while everything else feels groovy and relaxed. In “Bagel on the Malecon,” I tried to lift the Cuban “son” grooves from their solid grounding, beyond dancing steps, to a place where the melody and the bass take flight — and memorably, at that. The title is a flight in itself — a utopian fantasy that one day soon, I will be able to enjoy a bagel — a favorite New York bread creation — on the Malecon, the main boardwalk in Havana, Cuba.

“Plume”: I sketched “Plume” while my then-girlfriend (and now-wife) was studying at the University of Oxford, and I was listening to the magical voice of Rokia Traoré. I tried to create a sensuous music for belly dancing, without actually being very familiar with the genre at the time.

“Ori’s Fearful Symmetry” was originally intended to be a sort of an unofficial anthem for Israeli youth. I sketched it while hiking in the canyons of Ithaca, New York, where director Zohar Lavi was shooting the short film *Chronicle of a Jump*, starring our friend Ori. I was hoping this music would become the theme, an inspiring courageous dance in an unusual rhythmic grouping of 9/8 (3+2+2+2). Alas, it was decided that the film worked better in silence, and the music found an audience of its own.

“Crosstown” is a meditative dance, in which I attempted to fuse the delicate rhythms of music from the Republic of Mali with improvisational colors from India, all sketched aboard a slow ride on a late-night bus in New York City. It proceeds much like a Bolero, repeating the theme with extended improvisations and ornamentation, while occasionally being interrupted by a halting, contrasting gesture.

“Budget Bulgar”: a fiery Klezmer tune, was sketched between playing dance sets at a Russian wedding in western New Jersey, and is dedicated to Pete Sokolow, for many years the king of Jewish weddings in New York, a great klez-stride pianist, and an incredible personality. I propped my cellphone on the hood of a car in the parking lot, and left myself a voicemail with the melody, which I transcribed (and altered) at home.

DISC 2

1. Life of Birds

Mason Bates (b. 1977)

“The ambitious nature of the title and its many satellite movement headings belie the study of miniatures that is ‘Life of Birds.’

Some movements relate a pithy narrative; others live on

a more abstract level. ‘Moving Parts’ opens the work with a flurry of activity that needs little explanation. The lazy nodding-off of ‘Parakeet Daydream,’ illustrated by hushed delicacies low in the instruments, receives several unwelcome awakenings at key moments. ‘The Caged Bird Sings,’ the heart of the piece, encapsulates a long-lined melody in a cage of minimalist figuration. The melody seems to escape from its confines in the central section, but it is only a fleeting illusion. A mating dance on tiptoes unfolds in ‘On a Wire,’ where the two woodwind instruments persist in singing their lovesong despite the lopsided accompaniment. Finally, a very unfair fight emerges in ‘Old World Flycatcher,’ which is defined as ‘a small and agile bird that takes its insect prey on the wing.’ The skittish, insectoid motives in the flute and violin are no match for the clarinet, which enters low in its register but ultimately moves higher to devour its prey — which, like the piece as a whole, is quite small.”

2. Trail of Stars

Juhi Bansal (b. 1984)

“One of my favorite characteristics of nighttime photography is the ability to capture star trails. Taken over long hours, these images show paths in the night sky of stars moving relative to the earth. This piece plays with elements of time, improvisation and repetition to mirror the meditative serenity of these long-exposure shots, juxtaposed with moments of sharpness for the stars’ brilliant arcs of motion. *Trail of Stars* was written for harpist Alison Bjorkedal, and was originally written as part of the cantata ‘We Look to the Stars,’ commissioned by Los Angeles Opera.”

3. Exilios

Gabriela Ortiz (b. 1964)

“I have always wanted to pay tribute to those Spanish Republicans who arrived in Mexico at the end of the Spanish Civil War and whom through different circumstances I had the privilege and opportunity to meet. Three of them left an indelibly instructive imprint upon me, not only because they contributed to the development of culture, education, and science in our country, but above all because of the profoundly human aspect of their input. This piece is dedicated to and written in homage to those individuals, it aims to represent what can only be expressed through the medium of music: it is a musical depiction of what their struggle and desire for integrity came to denote for me.”

4. Peace

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

“Written just a month after the Great Sadness of the first quarantine orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, facing the shock felt by the whole globe as well as personal crisis, I find myself struggling to define what actually brings me joy. And I’m at a stage of making peace with sadness as it comes and goes like any other emotion. I’m learning to observe sadness for the first time not as a negative emotion, but as a necessary dynamic to the human experience.”

5. Island in the Sky

Michi Wiancko (b. 1976)

“I completed this piece while driving across America with my family, from the West to East Coasts through 15 states. We lingered long in Utah, Colorado and New Mexico, and I found deep musical inspiration in the majestic specificity of each windswept mesa, ancient desert, winding canyon and rock formation we explored along the way. It was finally against the backdrop of the Island in the Sky mesa, located in Utah’s Canyonlands National Park, that my piece for solo clarinet carved a space for itself, inspired by the power and persistence with which water and wind can cut through rock.”

6. “Daughters of Sol”

Aftab Darvishi (b. 1987)

“‘Daughters of Sol’ is inspired by a poem by contemporary Iranian poet Ahmad Shamlou. This piece contains gentle transitions and detailed changes, which leads to dissolving of different shades and colors. It is a constant evolution between shadows and lights. It is a journey about conveying gentle circular movements, which I think resemble the cycles of life. We evolve and dissolve in gentle and harsh conversions. We change colors, yet we tend to go back to our roots despite our differences.”

7. Family Photos

Kian Ravaei (b. 1999)

“Family Photos is a musical collage of personally significant places from my childhood. The first movement, ‘At the Carnival,’ takes inspiration from the whimsy and spectacle of my neighborhood carnival. ‘On the Tehran Tower,’ the second movement, incorporates elements of Iranian classical music, inspired by my childhood trips to visit family in Tehran. The third and final movement, ‘In Arcadia,’ represents not only my hometown in the suburbs of Los Angeles, but also the Arcadia of Ancient Greek mythology, a heaven on Earth.”

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