

Yale SCHOOL OF MUSIC

José García-León, Dean

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

Some Towns and Cities

Guitar Music of Benjamin Verdery

Sunday, December 15, 2024 | 3:00 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall in Sprague Memorial Hall

Benjamin Verdery
b. 1955

Capitola, CA (1990)

Keanea, HI (1990)

Milwaukee, WI (1988)

Benjamin Verdery, *classical and steel string guitar*

Dennis, MA (1989)

Seattle, WA (1989)

Benjamin Verdery, *classical guitar*
Rie Schmidt, *flute*

Mobile, AL (1989)

Benjamin Verdery, *classical guitar*
Jack Veas, *national steel guitar*

Program *cont.*

Verdery and
Mark Martin

From Aristotle (2015)

- I. The Poet Being an Imitator
- II. A Noun
- III. A Verb
- IV. The Wineless Cup

Benjamin Verdery, *amplified guitar*
Mark Martin, *mixed vocals*

INTERMISSION

Verdery

Raleigh, NC, Bird Fugue (2021)

World premiere

Benjamin Verdery, *classical guitar*
Hao Yang, *classical guitar*

Tread Lightly, For You Tread On My Dreams (2008)

Benjamin Verdery, *baritone guitar*

Scenes from Ellis Island (1992)

Benjamin Verdery, *conductor*
Rie Schmidt, *flute*
Matthew McDowell, *viola*
Jack Vees, *electric bass*
Mark Martin, *mixed vocals*
John Olson, *visual images*
Yale Guitar Orchestra

As a courtesy to others, please silence all devices. Photography and recording of any kind is strictly prohibited. Please do not leave the hall during musical selections. Thank you.

Artist Profile

Benjamin Verdery, *guitar & composer*

Called an ‘iconoclastic player’ by the *New York Times*, Ben Verdery has performed throughout Europe, North/South America, Europe, Australia, and Asia, including at the Metropolitan Opera, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Concertgebouw, 92Y Kaufmann Auditorium and guitar festivals around the world. Throughout his career, Verdery’s recitals have been noted for lyricism, invention, complexity, dynamism, and eclecticism. As a recording artist, Ben’s discography is extensive, with over 18 recordings. He has released albums of original and arranged material. Verdery has composed works for classical and non-classical guitar, for solo and duo, guitar quartets, guitar Orchestras and chamber groups, for himself and others including The Assad Duo, Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, guitarists David Russell, Scott Tennant, David Tanenbaum, John Williams, and John Etheridge.

February 2020 New Focus Records released *Scenes from Ellis Island, Guitar Music of Ben Verdery* with guest artists Simon Powis (guitar), Guilherme Monegatto (cello), Hawa Kasse Mady Diabate (vocals) and Mark Martin (beatboxer, mixed vocalist). In 2023 New Focus Records released *A Giant Beside You* with the award-winning Ulysses String Quartet. The CD features 4 world premier quintets including Bryce Dessner’s Quintet For High Strings.

He has released over 30 curated videos. The repertoire ranges from solo Bach to Jimi Hendrix. In addition, he has released duo videos with an array of disquieted artists including flutist Rie Schmidt, tenor James Taylor, hip hop artist Billy Dean, violist Ettore Causa, steel

string guitarists William Coulter, beat boxer vocalist Mark Martin, electric guitarist Andy Summers, and saxophonist Wayne Escoffery.

Many of the leading composers of our time have created music for him, including Ezra Laderman, Daniel Asia, Martin Bresnick, Elizabeth Brown, Bryce Dessner, Javier Farias, Thomas Flippin, Aaron Kernis, John Anthony Lennon, David Leisner, Hannah Lash, Ingram Marshall, Anthony Newman, Roberto Sierra, Van Stiefel, Christopher Theofanidis, and Jack Veas.

Verdery owes much to his guitar teachers Philip De Fremery and Frederic Hand, both of whom he studied with at SUNY Purchase, along with his mentors Anthony Newman and Seymour Bernstein. The Masterclasses he took in Arles, France with Leo Brouwer were seminal for Verdery as well.

Verdery has been a guitar professor at the Yale School of Music since 1985. He has also taught at New York University, Manhattan School of Music, Wisconsin Conservatory of Music, and Centro Flamenco Paco Peña (Spain). His teaching philosophy balances technique, interpretation, and performance, while also emphasizing curiosity, intuition, and the physical relationship to the instrument.

Benjamin Verdery was the Artistic Director of 92nd Street Y’s Art of the Guitar series from 2007–2020, served as Artistic Director of the D’Addario Foundation for the Performing Arts, and was Producer of his Maui Summer Master Class from 1999–2023. Verdery is also an Honorary Board Member of the Suzuki Association of the Americas.



Upcoming Events at YSM

- JAN 21 **Takács Quartet**
Oneppo Chamber Music Series
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Single tickets start at \$31, Yale faculty/staff start at \$23, students \$14
- JAN 22 & 27 **Peter Oundjian, *principal conductor* & Augustin Hadelich, *violin***
Yale Philharmonia & Yale in New York
7:30 p.m. | Woolsey Hall
Single tickets start at \$13, Yale faculty/staff start at \$9, students free
8:00 p.m. | Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall, NYC
Tickets start at \$29, carnegiehall.org
- JAN 26 **Daniel S Lee, *baroque violin* and Jeffrey Grossman, *harpsichord***
Faculty Artist Series
3:00 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Free admission
- JAN 29 **Yefim Bronfman, *piano***
Horowitz Piano Series
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Single tickets start at \$31, Yale faculty/staff start at \$23, students start at \$12
- JAN 31 **Mali Obomsawin**
Ellington Jazz Series
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Tickets start at \$26, Yale faculty/staff start at \$19, Students start at \$11

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Some Towns and Cities

Guitar Music of Benjamin Verdery

Sunday, December 15, 2024 | 3:00 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall in Sprague Memorial Hall

Artist Profiles

Mark Martin, *mixed vocals*

NYC based Mixed Vocal Artist Mark Martin loves to explore the shared space between music and language, celebrating communication and connection through our human instrument. Martin does this with his fusion of music and storytelling through vocal traditions from all over the world, reimagining classic stories and text in immersive and interactive ways. Martin is a National and International Beatbox Champion, Co-Organizer of the American Beatbox Championships from 2016–2024, and judge and performer at the first hip-hop festival held in Times Square, NYC. Martin specializes in beatbox theater, performing on Broadway in Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Freestyle Love Supreme*, Internationally with "Voca People", and Off-Broadway in *Midsummer: A Shakespeare Experience*. Martin was Music Director and performer in *Medea: Re-Versed* both at the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival and Off-Broadway. Martin has performed at venues including Carnegie Hall, the Blue Note, and The Friar's Club, and was a featured performer and creative consultant for an interactive series of performances with the Brazosport Symphony Orchestra.

Martin has appeared on MTV, as well as in films such as *Beatbox*. Martin is a passionate educator, and co-founder of The Academy of Noise, a beatbox, music, and leadership program. AON has conducted research with institutions such as NYU to show the impact of beatboxing on speech therapy. You can learn more by checking out his Ted Talk "You're a Beatboxer. Let Me Show You". Martin has worked internationally with the US State Department through their Hip-Hop Diplomacy initiative "Next Level" in Jordan and Washington D.C.. Martin has taught or presented at several universities, including Yale, Harvard, and USC, as well as taught in New Orleans with several youth programs including The Roots of Music. Martin graduated from the Gallatin School at NYU in 2011, creating his own major exploring beatboxing as a language. One of Martin's most cherished collaborations is with the Great Guitar God and Vibe Master Ben Verdery on *From Aristotle*, a reimagining of the birth of language. Thank you Ben! The first step to speaking up is making a sound.

Jack Vees, *guitar*

Jack Vees has a particularly distinctive and personal musical style that is instantly recognizable. His music unselfconsciously combines rigorous formal thinking with the raw energy of rock music, as well as an irreverent, acerbic wit.

Technology is an integral part of much of Veess' work, and he elegantly combines electronics with acoustic and electric instruments. In 1998, Veess was profiled in *Rolling Stone* as a pioneer of music technology and hailed as a "21st century alchemist." His work has been described as "music of raw, direct power" (*Fanfare*), and that his work "twangs with excitement" (*New York Times*). In addition to being a leader in electronic music composition and performance, Veess is also a prominent educator in the field, From 1986 till 2023, Veess taught courses on music technology and studio techniques at the Yale School of Music, serving as co-founder and director of Yale University's acclaimed Center for Studies in Music Technology (CSMT).

He received his MFA from California Institute of the Arts, where he studied music composition with Louis Andriessen, Vinko Globokar, and Morton Subotnick. His works have been performed throughout the world by numerous ensembles and soloists for whom he has written, including Ensemble Modern, the California Ear Unit, Zeitgeist, oboist Libby Van Cleve, cellists Jeffrey Krieger and Ashley Bathgate, guitarist Ben Verdery, and electronic percussionist Amy Knoles; along with music theater works for both the So and Sandbox percussion quartets. His music has been heard at New Music America, Neue Musik New York/Cologne, Bang On A Can, and Soundings.

Veess' solo bass album *The Restaurant Behind the Pier* (truly a solo bass album!) has been lauded at home and abroad as an ambitious and overwhelmingly successful undertaking. His mastery of extended techniques on the bass led him to write *The Book on Bass Harmonics* (Alfred Music Publishers, 1981), which has become a standard reference on the subject. He is currently working on a new opera about the parallel lives of Antonie van Leeuwenhoek and Johannes Vermeer.

Rie Schmidt, *flute*

Rie Schmidt is a graduate of SUNY Purchase. In 1983, she gave her Carnegie Recital Hall debut as a winner of the Artists International Competition. Ms. Schmidt is a member of the Westchester Philharmonic and the American Symphony and has performed with the New York City Ballet Orchestra, the American Composers Orchestra and many Broadway shows. She was featured as a flutist and dancer in Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* that was performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. She and her husband, guitarist Benjamin Verdery, concertize as a duo throughout the US and Europe, and have recorded two CDs of music for flute and guitar *Reverie* (Sony) and *Enchanted Dawn* (GRI). She is a founding member of Flute Force, a flute quartet, which has four CDs- *Flute Force* (CRI), *Pastorale* (VAI), *Eyewitness* (innova) and *Silver Halo*. She teaches at The Bloomingdale School of Music, The Allen-Stevenson School and The 92nd Street Y in New York City. Her publications include Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloé* (McGinnis and Marx) arranged for flute quintet, and Barber's *Adagio* (Schirmer Music). Ms. Schmidt was the president of the New York Flute Club from 1995-98.

INSTUMENT DESIGNERS

CLASSICAL GUITAR

Garrett Lee
Greg Smallman
Vu Tran Dinh

BARITONE GUITAR

Otto Vowinkel

STEEL STRING GUITAR

Jeff Traugott

ALL STRINGS

D'Addario

YALE GUITAR ORCHESTRA

Joe Tollefsen
Javier Llaca Ojinaga
Barbie Matthews
Calvin Junsay
Tristan Byrne
Tori Sodeinde
Jack Davisson
Brandon Wong
Fangfang Liu
Hao Yang
Alan Liu
Joseph Ehrenpreis
Phee Phafupaibul
Harry Long Ngo
Emmett Edwards
Kim Perlak

Program Notes

Today's concert is a celebration. I am thrilled to be playing solos and duos with dear friends as well as conducting current and YSM alumni guitar students in my work, *Scenes from Ellis Island*.

This concert marks my final concert as the guitar professor at the Yale School of Music. I am guessing that in my 40 years of teaching at YSM, this may be roughly my 37th concert as I played one almost annually not counting the Covid years.

All concerts are unique and precious occasions. It is on the concert stage where performers share with the audience, their deepest emotions drawn from the music they are playing. What makes live performances so ineffable are among other things, the performer, the music, the instrument, the audience and the concert space. I have always loved playing for the audiences at Yale and it must be said that Morse Recital Hall is one of the most sacred recital halls in our country.

In 1991, the Newport Classics label released my cd *Some Towns and Cities*. It was a collection of 15 works comprised of guitar solos, duos and ensemble works with guitar. The pieces were based on my musical impressions of places and people in different towns and cities in the United States. The idea of doing this was completely inspired by one of my favorite Spanish composers - Isaac Albéniz. Recording this cd was one of the greatest musical experiences of my career. I was able to write and record duets for 4 of my favorite guitarists, John Williams, Paco Peña, Leo Kottke, and my former teacher, Frederic Hand. In 1992 Guitar Player magazine awarded it Best Classical Guitar Recording of the year.

For this concert it seemed appropriate to present a program of my guitar music with many of my *Some Towns and Cities* works being featured. The concert opens with three solos from the *Some Towns and Cities* cd.

Capitola, CA is one of my favorite little towns in Northern California. Musically the piece draws its inspiration from Francois Couperin and The Allman Brothers Band. *Keanae, HI* is a magical peninsula on the Island of Maui. It is performed here on a steel string guitar tuned in slack-key guitar tuning used by many great Slack-key guitarists on the Islands. *Milwaukee WI* is an homage to one of my favorite guitarist/composers, Leo Kottke. It is one of the first little pieces I remember composing.

That set is followed by *Memories of Ellis Island*. This is a work I revised extensively in July of 2024. The musical material for this work is largely taken from the piece that concludes the program, *Scenes from Ellis Island*.

Dennis, MA is inspired by the expansive low tides on the beaches of Dennis, Cape Cod. As a boy, I was mesmerized by the various tidepools and still am!! It is written and dedicated to my wife, flutist Rie Schmidt.

Seattle, WA is a city that has always welcomed me warmly and that I love. It is also the birthplace of my hero Jimi Hendrix.

The city of *Mobile, AL* moved me greatly when I was in residence there many years ago. The humidity, the water and the souls that seemed to be calling me from ages past all found their way into this miniature. I am ever grateful to my dear friend Jack Vees for playing it so beautifully.

From Aristotle is a four-movement work performed continuously. The text is taken from Aristotle's book on linguistics. It is co-composed by mixed-vocal artist Mark Martin and me. Mark and I tried to create music we felt best related to the text. The piece invites the listener to take a short sonic journey which includes sounds of nature, East Indian rhythms, Tuvan throat singing, lyrical vocal passages, parallel drum and guitar lines, and an extended beat box solo leading to the concluding baroque/gospel guitar lament. *From Aristotle* represents one of the more unique and exhilarating collaborations of my career. It was written in 2015-2016 and premiered in January 2016. Below is the text. The final movement does not contain text.

I. The Poet Being an Imitator - things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be

II. A Noun - A noun is a composite significant sound, not marking time, of which no part is in itself significant

III. A Verb - A verb is a composite significant sound, marking time, in which, as in the noun, no part is in itself significant. For 'man' or 'white' does not express the idea of 'when'; but 'he walks' or 'he has walked' does connote time, present or past

IV. The Wineless Cup

A video of the work can be seen on YouTube on both Mark's and my channels. Mark and I recorded this work for my cd, *Scenes from Ellis Island* on the New Focus label.

Raleigh, NC, written in 2021, is an addition to the *Some Towns and Cities* collection. It was commissioned by the Kossler Guitar Duo who recorded it on their fabulous cd, *Preludes and Fugues Vol. 1*. The piece is based on many of the bird calls from Raleigh, NC. I am thrilled to be premiering the "bird fugue" with YSM's Artist Diploma guitarist, Hao Yang.

Tread Lightly, For You Tread on My Dreams is dedicated to my late dear brother Dan who passed tragically in 2008.

Scenes from Ellis Island was commissioned in 1992 by Lou Mannarino for his guitar ensemble at the Curtis High School on Staten Island. It has since been performed throughout North America, Australia, Europe and Japan. The piece was inspired by a trip to the Ellis Island Museum. I was particularly moved by various photographs of people in whose eyes one saw such hardship - so many, hoping and dreaming of a better future life here in America. You will see many of these photographs in the video that will be shown throughout the performance. I am extremely grateful to my dear friend John Olson for curating and editing this video. John also curated and edited the *Scenes from Ellis Island* video that can be seen on YouTube. The music of that performance is on my cd of the same name. Ellis Island was known as the "Island of Hope, Island of Tears." This description weighed heavily on my mind as I wrote the piece.

Since the Staten Island students who first premiered the piece saw Ellis Island weekly, if not daily, as they traveled on the ferry to Manhattan, I thought it was fertile ground to base a composition for both the performers and the composer. As time has passed the piece has taken on a new meaning for me and many others that have performed it. Learned historians have taught us that the narrative of the America that I grew up with - "a melting pot" where all races are "welcome" - is not and was not always quite so. This topic of who we are as a country takes on more meaning particularly in today's political climate. We, like so many countries, are a work in progress.

Scenes from Ellis Island is comprised of 8 sections/scenes with a brief introductory statement that is restated midway through the work. The two guitar solos preview the harmonic and melodic material for the final section. Each section reflects various human emotions. They unfold in layers, at times referencing the powerful unsettling waves of the ocean. Midway through the work each guitar ascends in pitch arriving beyond the neck of the guitar and playing muted random pitches arrhythmically. Following that is an improvisation of various sounds and spoken word from the performers. During this section we will have a guest playing a piece of their choosing to evoke memories of one's native country. The final section of the work combines an East Indian rhythm with western harmonies and melodies. There will be a surprise soloist at the very end of the piece.

I want to extend a huge thanks to all the performers on this concert. In addition, I want to thank the extraordinary YSM staff who helped make it possible. I am certain this is a concert I won't forget!

As always - Peace, Love and Guitars!!

Benjamin Verdery