

andPlay @ Kent State's Vanguard New Music Series

by Mike Telin



When the duo andPlay — Maya Bennardo, violin, and Hannah Levinson, viola — were in Cleveland to perform on the Re:Sound Festival last summer, *ClevelandClassical.com* critic Jarrett Hoffman [wrote](#) that “Bennardo and Levinson played with obvious chemistry, genuinely at ease with one another in the kind of way that just makes an audience feel good.”

On Thursday, November 21, [andPlay](#) will return to Northeast Ohio for a performance on the Kent State Vanguard New Music Series. The 7:30 pm concert in Ludwig Recital Hall will include Leah Asher’s *Letters to My Future Self* (2018), Clara Iannotta’s *Limun* (2011), Anthony Vine’s *Terrain* (2019), Scott Wollschleger’s *Violain* (2017), and the premiere of a new work by Adam Roberts. The event is free.

I caught up with the duo by telephone and began our conversation by asking how their invitation to Kent came about.

Hannah Levinson: Adam Roberts teaches at Kent. We played a piece of his a few years ago, so that’s how we met him, and since then we’ve become friends. When he went to Kent he wanted to bring us there, so we commissioned this new piece from him. He introduced us to Noa Even, who runs the Re:Sound Festival. But it was a coincidence that we ended up going to the Festival, and it was very funny when we realized that it was the same Noa.

Mike Telin: Please say a few words about the piece.

Maya Bennardo: It's a two-movement piece, and we previewed one the movements back in October.

HL: It was nice that we played something of his before because he was able to incorporate what he knows about us as players and people into the piece. It feels like all the motifs are being stretched. They are repeated and become more intricate, and the patterns are expanded in different ways. It creates a large and thick texture.

MB: There are interweaving patterns — like taking a fabric and pulling it so you can see through it a little bit.

HL: With our commissions, it's about finding people who will write something that sounds like more than just two string instruments, and Adam's piece does that. It creates a multi-layered, complex, and powerful work.

MT: Congratulations on your new album playlist on New Focus Recordings. Will you be performing any works from that recording?

MB: Just one, Clara Iannotta's *Limun*. It's the only piece on the album that was not written for us.

HL: The album represents a lot of our earlier commissions because it was a long time in the works. We have commissioned so many pieces since then and this program is weighted toward our newer pieces.

MB: We were introduced to *Limun* through another ensemble that we both played in, so we emailed Clara, and when we were playing in Boston, we met her and became friends. We've worked with her on the piece, so even though it was not written for us, it feels very personal.

MT: How did you come to know Anthony Vine?

MB: He's now based in San Diego but he is originally from Columbus. We met him through another ensemble when he was living in Brooklyn. He won the Gaudeamus in 2016, and when he was writing the piece for that competition, he came over to record some harmonics and stuff. We chatted and we had a lot of musical things in common, and since then he's been on our wish list of people we wanted to work with.

MT: I understand there's a funny story behind the title of Scott Wollschleger's Violain.

HL: If you watch our [video](#), you'll hear that the piece has a lot of repeated patterns that Scott talks about as glitches or lopsided patterns. He didn't have a title for it so he just wrote 'Violin and Viola' as a placeholder, but he made a typo, which is Violain, and he thought that would be the perfect title for the piece. A little mistake, but the piece is supposed to sound a little bit like a mistake.

MT: How did you both end up following the path to a career in new music?

MB & HL: Oberlin was a huge part of that.

HL: Tim Weiss and the Contemporary Music Ensemble.

MB: CME is a great environment for undergraduates to explore different kinds of music. We're both classically trained so it was exciting to be able to work with living composers and to find different ways to express yourself on your instrument with a different sound world.

HL: CME for me too. It felt so different to be the only person on the part. I still play orchestra music and a lot of classical music, but it was invigorating to feel like you played an artistic role in the music you were creating.

MT: After Oberlin you both found yourselves in New York City — how did andPlay come about?

HL: Haphazardly. We were both in a larger ensemble that had a residency on Fire Island and they wanted people to go there and play chamber music. Maya is obsessed with the ocean so she called me and said, let's go do this. We learned some duos and ended up having such a great time.

MB: But the repertoire for violin and viola is very limited, so in that sense it is exciting that we are able to create the repertoire that we want — and work with the people we want to work with. We're building a repertoire but it's also great to see these pieces have a life with other ensembles.

HL: We are lucky to have stumbled into being a duo. Finding space to rehearse is not an issue. We don't need a piano, and it's very simple to find a car and lodging for two people when touring. There are a lot of perks to just being us that we enjoy.

MT: How did you come up with the name andPlay?

MB: Naming something, especially an ensemble, is always a process. Looking around, plants, spices, and a bottle of wine were all potential names.

But the name came from when I was playing a piece with another ensemble, and we all had to wear headphones because everyone had a different clicktrack. This little voice would shout ‘and play!’ really fast.

We thought about it and kept coming back to it — andPlay. It’s short and concise and others liked it, so that’s what we call ourselves.

HL: And a lot of the music we play is heavy, but our personalities are happy and fun.

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