

Yolanda Kondonassis:
Five Minutes for Earth
at Cleveland Museum of Art

by Mike Telin



“When we see an idea expressed in the language of art, our sensory reactions often open the heart and mind to interaction in ways that mere facts may not,” writes Yolanda Kondonassis, who is not only a celebrated harpist but also the founder and director of the [Earth at Heart](#) foundation. “Action is the goal, but a visceral call to engagement can be the catalyst. There is not a minute to lose in our battle to protect the future of our planet, and an inspired commitment can make all the difference.”

On her latest recording, *Five Minutes for Earth*, Kondonassis asked fifteen composers to write five-minute works for solo harp that “expressed our Earth in some condition or atmosphere.”

Released in April 2022 on Azica Records, the album features music by Jocelyn C. Chambers, Chen Yi, Michael Daugherty, Daniel Dorff, Reena Esmail, Keith Fitch, Patrick Harlin, Stephen Hartke, Nathaniel Heyder, Takuma Itoh, Aaron Jay Kernis, Philip Maneval, Máximo Diego Pujol, Gary Schocker, Arturo Sandoval, and Zhou Long.

On Sunday, October 23 at 7:00 pm at Cleveland Museum of Art’s Gartner Auditorium, Kondonassis will present a program that includes the world-premiere live performances of all fifteen works along with recently composed pieces, poetry, and visual art. Tickets are available [online](#).

How did she attract such a stellar group of composers — all of whom waived their commission fees? “I did win the lottery,” the harpist said during a recent telephone conversation. “Not only did they embrace the prompt artistically, but I was blown away by the diversity of musical content, creativity, and innovation this diverse group put into their pieces. When each piece came in and I put it on my music stand, there was a period when I was just saying, ‘Wow! It’s Christmas.’”



Sunday’s concert will also include a new piece of poetry by Cleveland Orchestra solo English horn and oboist Robert Walters. “He’s such a sublime player but I’m not sure how many people know that he has an MFA in poetry from Columbia,” Kondonassis said. “The poem is titled *Terra Infirma*, and I believe he wrote most of it during the recent Cleveland Orchestra tour. I’ve read it many times and I think that these are words put to good use.”

The program also includes two never-before-heard works: Steven Mark Kohn’s *Will We Recognize This Place* for harp and three voices, and *Wildflower (Yolanda’s Song)* by legendary jazz artist and composer Arturo Sandoval, which will be released as a single on the Azica label later this season.

During the evening, prizes will be awarded to the winners of the first *Earth at Heart* visual art competition. “This was in partnership with the Cleveland School of the Arts and the talent is amazing. And again, the students responded to the same prompt as the composers.”

Recognizing that playing seventeen world premieres in one evening is “an awful lot,” Kondonassis said she has enlisted assistance from her former students Ina McCormack, Xiao Du, Juan Riveros, and Grace Roepke. “I thought I owed it to the composers to give their works a premiere and I thought what better way to promote the mission of the Five Minute project than to include people who I hope will go out and play them.”

Eventually each piece of music will have an accompanying video created by Jared Hall. “This is still a work in progress,” Kondonassis said, noting that the plan is to have most of the videos released within the year. “Jared is the brother of one of my stellar former students. I would go beyond calling him a videographer, I would say he’s more of a cinematographer — he can take anything and make it visually captivating. The videos he did for Reena Esmail’s *Inconvenient Wounds* and Chen Yi’s *Dark Mountains* are very interesting. And Michael Daugherty provided images for Jared to use because his piece is inspired by Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*.”

Sunday’s concert is one that has many far-reaching tentacles. “I’ve always considered the album *Five Minutes for Earth* to be the launch of what I plan to be a catalog of works called the *Five Minutes Collection*,” Kondonassis said. Her hope is for people not only to learn, program, and play the pieces, but also to ruminate on how as musicians they can do something that will have a positive impact on the climate challenge.

We closed our conversation on a quote from Goethe that she finds inspiring and relevant: “What you can do, or dream you can, begin it; boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.”

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