

Faculty Recital

Erik Steighner, Saxophone & Oksana Ejokina, Piano

Sunday, September 21, 2025 at 3pm
Lagerquist Concert Hall, Mary Baker Russell Music Center

Pacific Lutheran University
The College of Professional Studies and School of Music, Theatre & Dance present

Faculty Recital

Erik Steighner, Saxophone & Oksana Ejokina, Piano

Sunday, September 21, 2025 at 3pm
Lagerquist Concert Hall, Mary Baker Russell Music Center

Welcome to Lagerquist Concert Hall.
Please disable the audible signal on all watches and cellular phones for the duration of the concert.
Use of cameras, recording equipment, and all digital devices is not permitted in the concert hall.

PROGRAM

The White Horse Carter Pann (b. 1972)

Sonate pour hautbois et piano..... Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

I. Élégie

trans. AJ Pratt

II. Scherzo

III. Déploration

Monologue (Impressions on *The True Story of Ah Q*)..... Chen Yi (b. 1953)

trans. Jeffrey Heisler

The Nine Lives of Adolphe Sax..... Max Wolpert (b. 1993)

World premiere

I. Falling

II. Acid

III. Pins & Needles

IV. Hot Iron

V. Gunpowder

VI. Fumes & Vapors

VII. Drowning

VIII. Pneumonia

IX. Immortality

Sanctuary Viet Cuong (b. 1990)

Program Notes

The White Horse (2023/24) is a single-movement solo for alto saxophone which explores the idea of extremes. My greatest hope is that it shines a light on the musicianship and raw virtuosity of the performer above any other of its properties.

When I was first asked to write this work, my thoughts went to a 1983 music video by the Danish band, Laid Back. Their song “White Horse” is about using (or riding) the drug heroin. In this way, I wanted to write a single-movement piece that has the effect of a drug-induced euphoric frenzy in its seeming randomness at times, but also in its immediate back-and-forth between pyrotechnics and more subdued, blissed moments. Also, I simply like the phrase “The White Horse” and think it will lend the work some appropriate intrigue.

– Carter Pann

While Francis Poulenc’s *Oboe Sonata* (1962) was intended as a tribute to Sergei Prokofiev, it was first performed only a few months after Poulenc’s death in 1963. Rather than following a traditional fast-slow-fast sonata form, it features an elegiac opening movement, a Prokofiev-influenced scherzando, and what Poulenc described as “a sort of liturgical chant” to close the piece.

– Erik Steighner

It has been strongly haunting me for a long time to think about ignorance and civilization, lowliness and pride. This piece for solo clarinet was inspired by Lu Xun’s *The True Story of Ah Q* (1993). Lu Xun (Zhou Shuren, 1881-1936) is China’s best-known 20th-century author of essays and short stories, in which he called on the Chinese people to rise and give battle of feudalism. I want to express my gratitude to Inter-Artes in London, who commissioned and premiered the piece at a concert, *The World of Lu Xun*, on April 23, 1993 in Birmingham, U.K., for offering me an opportunity to listen to my heart through my own music monologue.

Lu Xun (Lu Hsun) (1881-1936), the father of contemporary Chinese literature, was not only a great writer but also a great revolutionary and thinker. With a pen as his weapon he waged a heroic struggle against imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat-capitalism. The writings he has left us are a treasured part of the rich literary heritage of the Chinese people. During the days when China was under the reactionary rule of imperialist and feudal forces, the author used his articles to expose the ugliness of the dark society. In his articles, the author gives us a perceptive and sensitive account of life at that time. The power of his writing is revealed in his sharp, precise style. Ah Q is a representative image of common Chinese people in the early 20th century. He is described in Lu’s novel *A True Story of Ah Q* as a Chinese male, simple, ignorant, non-educated, arrogant, conceited, looking down on his own motherland and people, and its culture, but admired foreigners for everything, no independent thinking and no feeling about democracy, but apathetic politically. The author satirized Ah Q, in order to arouse the people to build up a new society with civilization and self-confidence.

I highly respect Mr. Lu Xun and think that every citizen has a responsibility to improve the understanding between peoples within environments, and to make all possible contributions to society. The solo piece is a meditation of introspection inspired by *The True Story of Ah Q*.

– Chen Yi

The universe, some say, demanded that the saxophone come to be; and accomplished this by making its inventor, Adolphe Sax, incredibly difficult to kill. As a small child, he fell from a third-story window onto his head, the first of many brushes with death.

Over the course of his life, Sax was struck in the head by falling bricks; nearly drowned in a river; accidentally drank acid; swallowed a needle; slept in a room filled with toxic fumes; fell onto red-hot ironware; and was set afire by exploding gunpowder. In his middle years, he also contracted and beat cancer. Adolphe Sax finally (finally!) died of pneumonia at the age of 79, but his legacy will live on forever in the instrument that bears his name.

The Nine Lives of Adolphe Sax (2025) is a suite of character miniatures. Each one musically depicts one of the phenomena that tried – and failed – to kill our hero.

This piece is funny, but it isn't a joke. It is quirky, but it isn't a gimmick. It is a warm, heartfelt love letter to a very unusual man and his very brilliant invention.

– Max Wolpert

Sanctuary (2020) honors a few simple chord progressions that have provided me solace throughout my life. Over the years, these progressions have formed a sort of personal, sonic refuge that I can reliably visit in lonely or uncertain times. During this particular year of great loss, the comfort these chords provide is keenly felt. In *Sanctuary* I hope to share this sense of comfort by placing the listener and performers in a reverberant atmosphere where these harmonies continually swirl and echo around each other. It's essentially my attempt at writing a musical hug.

– Viet Cuong

About the Performers

Praised by the *Tacoma News Tribune* for his “effortless lyricism” and “smooth tone and fluid virtuosity,” saxophonist **Erik Steighner** has performed with the Austin Symphony Orchestra, the Federal Way Symphony, the Northwest Sinfonietta, the Pacific Northwest Ballet Orchestra, the San Antonio Symphony, the Tacoma Opera, and Symphony Tacoma. Steighner teaches at Pacific Lutheran University, the University of Puget Sound, and Tacoma Community College, where his courses have included saxophone lessons, chamber music, music theory, ear training, music appreciation, and digital music. He is also on faculty at the University of Puget Sound Community Music Department and is the founder and conductor of the South Sound Saxophone Ensemble. Steighner has premiered dozens of solo and chamber works and appears on CD releases from labels including Albany Records, Alea Publishing, Mark Custom, Naxos, Reference Recordings, and Vienna Modern Masters. He holds bachelor's degrees in music and English from the University of Puget Sound and master's and doctoral degrees in saxophone performance from The University of Texas at Austin. While living in Austin, he served on the faculty at Texas State University. A Conn-Selmer artist, Steighner performs on Selmer Paris saxophones and mouthpieces.

Pianist **Oksana Ejokina** appears frequently as guest recitalist, concerto soloist, and chamber musician on concert series across the United States. Oksana has soloed with the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra in Russia, Seattle Symphony, Tacoma Symphony, Washington-Idaho Symphony, and University of Washington Symphony Orchestra, and performed in venues such as the Phillips Collection in Washington DC, Benaroya Hall, Davies Orchestra Hall, and Klassik Keyifler Festival in Turkey. Her recent premier performances include works by Marilyn Shrude, Laura Kaminsky, Wayne Horvitz, and Bern Herbolzheimer. She has been featured on multiple live radio broadcasts on such stations as WFMT-Chicago, KUOW and KING FM in Seattle, and Maine Public Radio. Her collaborations have included concerts with the Seattle Chamber Players, Avalon String Quartet, violinist Ian Swensen, and cellists Johannes Moser, David Requiro, and Meta Weiss, among others. Oksana was awarded a doctor of musical arts degree in piano performance from Stony Brook University in 2004. She is the pianist of the Volta Piano Trio, whose recordings for the Con Brio label received accolades in multiple international music magazines, such as *The Strad*, *Gramophone*, and *American Record Guide*. Her other longstanding collaboration is with the pianist Christina Dahl. A sought-after teacher, she currently serves as Professor of Piano and Coordinator of Piano Studies at Pacific Lutheran University and is in demand as an adjudicator and masterclass teacher. Dr. Ejokina's students have won top prizes in numerous state, national, and international competitions, have participated in prestigious summer programs, and have been accepted to top colleges and conservatories in the US to pursue their undergraduate and graduate studies. A committed arts educator, Oksana served as Artistic Director of the Chamber Music Festival and Institute at the Icicle Creek Center for the Arts and now directs T-Town Chamber Music Festival and Institute in Tacoma, where she resides.