

Guest Artist Recital

Nick May, Saxophone & Alex Siu Lun Li, Piano

You, Me, Us: A Celebration of Queer Music for Saxophone and Piano

Thursday, March 5, 2026 at 7:30pm

Jennie Lee Hansen Recital Hall, Mary Baker Russell Music Center

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

Guest Artist Recital

Nick May, Saxophone & Alex Siu Lun Li, Piano
You, Me, Us: A Celebration of Queer Music for Saxophone and Piano

Thursday, March 5, 2026 at 7:30pm
Jennie Lee Hansen Recital Hall, Mary Baker Russell Music Center

Welcome to Jennie Lee Hansen Recital 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

Made possible in part by the generous support of Légère Reeds.

- Upwelling** **Kevin Day (b. 1996)**
- I Can't Go to Florida** **Alex Temple (b. 2003)**
- Anders als die Andern** **Ingrid Stölzel (b. 1971)**
- Silence Still = Death** **Nathan Froebe (b. 1983)**
- Little Drama Queen** **Rex Isenberg (b. 1987)**
Talkative
Twirling
Mommy's Closet
Jazz Hands

Program Notes

After the clouds of May gray and June gloom part above the cracked pavements and faded flags of San Diego's LGBTQ+ neighborhood, a restless excitement stirs in Hillcrest. When glorious sunshine once again illuminates Hillcrest's gay bars and ocean breezes tickle its gigantic central rainbow flag, its citizens know what is coming: San Diego Pride. Though most cities celebrate their Prides in June, commemorating each anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Riots, San Diego Pride takes place in July, and its parade and festival attract over 250,000 people to America's Finest City. The San Diego Pride Parade marches through Hillcrest, westward along University and then southward down 6th Avenue to the Pride Festival at the iconic Balboa Park, with the panoramic view of the Cabrillo Bridge and the California Tower framing two afternoons of unrepentant and unashamed community celebration. Each of San Diego's Pride Parades ends with a quarter mile-long rainbow banner, during which parade-goers are encouraged to step underneath the flag and support the procession. Underneath the colors of the Pride flag, participants feel an overwhelming rush of love and acceptance, the oversaturated upwelling of emotions repressed: the enjoyment of life in red, the necessary healing embodied by orange, the dazzling yellow sunlight, a recommitment to nature embedded in green, blue's deep serenity, and the spirit of the community that surround us in violet. After facing year after year of political forces fighting to erase queer people from public life and facing a community normally hellbent on division, we come together once a year to show ourselves the love that we deserve. Pride is a special experience, a time for sharing and loving not just the community encouraged and highlighted by its mission, but each other and oneself. It can be hard to be confronted with one's own pain and suffering at Pride, but Pride is a conduit for change. It's an opportunity to become whole again. *Upwelling* honors and immortalizes the energy of Pride parades and festivals through the lens of experiencing San Diego Pride with those you love.

I Can't Go to Florida was written for Nick May's I Exist Project, which is dedicating to commissioning new works by queer composers. The piece has "secret" lyrics, which comment on the current state of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in the state and the moral character of the governor who has signed them into law. There's also a section where I reminisce about a nice trip I took there as a teenager.

I can't go to Florida because
They might throw me in jail
Just for using the bathroom—
And on top of that,
It would be a men's jail!

In June, 2025, a trans woman
Named Marcy Rheintgen
Was arrested for using the women's bathroom
At the Capitol in Tallahassee.
The charges were dropped, but still...

Ron DeSantis is a noxious pile
Of toxic waste, and so
Are his ideological brethren!

Did you know he was a lawyer at Guantánamo Bay?
And that according to Harper's Bazaar,
He just laughed at the prisoners being tortured.

And now he's brought his trademark sadistic
attitude
To the business of running the state!

When I was fifteen,
And still ostensibly a boy,
I went to visit my long-distance girlfriend
In the suburbs of Miami.
We went to Hot Topic,
And made out to Fauré's Requiem.

But now the Miami suburbs are one of the places
Where rainbow crosswalks
Were erased by the Florida Department of
Transportation.
They did the same thing to the Pride Memorial
Crosswalk
In Orlando,

And posted cops around it
To prevent it from being repainted.

So I can't go to Florida right now,
But maybe someday all of us will take over the damn
place,
And turn it into a queer utopia!
Yeah!

Anders als die Andern (Different from the Others) was inspired by the eponymous 1919 German silent movie. This film is considered the first explicitly queer full-length feature film. One of its powerful messages is an appeal to end judicial and societal persecution. This message from over 100 years ago is utterly contemporary, especially considering the current rise of conservative lawmakers around the United States pushing anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. The scenes I selected from the full-length movie center on how these laws affect the lives and livelihoods of the LGBTQ+ community and how they are a contributing factor in the high suicide rate amongst its members. This piece was commissioned by Nicholas

May for the I Exist Project. **CONTENT WARNING:** The film and narrative discuss suicide. The film opens with famous violinist Paul Körner reading obituaries in the newspaper. He becomes visibly upset. He knows that many of the men took their lives because of the German law known as Paragraph 175, a law which stated that “an unnatural sex act committed between persons of the male sex is punishable by imprisonment.” In his mind’s eye he sees a procession of famous people from history who suffered a similar fate: Peter Tchaikovsky, Leonardo da Vinci, Oscar Wilde, and others. Paul Körner falls in love with Kurt Sivers and the two men are shown walking arm in arm in a public park. While walking together, they pass a man, Franz Bollek who recognizes Körner. Later that day, Bollek confronts him and demands money or else he will expose Sivers. Körner pays him and keeps it a secret from Sivers. Eventually the blackmailer’s demands become too great and Körner refuses to pay. He reports Bollek for blackmail and has him arrested. In retaliation, Bollek exposes Körner. The judge is sympathetic to Körner and gives him the minimum sentence of one week in prison. Allowed to go home before starting his term, Körner finds himself shunned by friends and family, and no longer employable. His concert agency drops him. He again sees in his mind’s eye the procession of individuals throughout history, and this time he joins the line-up as its last member. He then takes pills and dies of suicide. Kurt Sivers rushes to Paul’s side as he lies dead. Devastated Kurt wants to take his own life. A doctor (a character in the full version of the movie) prevents this and delivers the final powerful message of the movie: You have to keep living; live to change the prejudices by which this man has been made one of the countless victims. You must bring justice to him, and all those who came before him, and all those to come after him. Justice through knowledge!

In 1987, the Silence = Death Project created a now iconic political poster as a symbol of public awareness and resistance to government inaction about the HIV/AIDS crisis. The poster itself is a solid black background, with a pink triangle in the middle and the words SILENCE = DEATH capitalized in white at the bottom. This abstract image was purposely chosen over photographic or realistic representations to be as inclusionary as possible. The pink triangle was a symbol that the 1970’s gay liberation movement had re-appropriated from its use in Nazi Germany, where it was formerly used as a defamatory mark to identify and persecute homosexuals. For the 30th anniversary of the poster, an installation was created for the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, adding the words “Be Vigilant. Refuse. Resist.” I chose to title this work *Silence Still = Death* as means of embracing the original message of the poster while expanding on its inclusionary imagery. In 2023, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is still ongoing, and while it is no longer a death sentence, it still remains an underserved and underrepresented medical emergency spanning all communities worldwide. Additionally, marginalized groups at large are facing increased amounts of backlash to our social progress and acceptance, where oppressors are working to silence our voices in any way they can. These efforts are thinly veiled attempts at wanting to erase our presence, and thus existence. Ultimately, this means they want us dead, as it would be the only way to truly achieve their nefarious goal. The piece itself moves through four main sections. It begins with a heartbeat motif that remains throughout the work, with the first section being calm yet passionate and featuring the work’s singular melodic theme. The second section becomes more energized, balancing beauty with vigilant resistance. The third section becomes frenetic, with the heartbeat motif growing increasingly unstable until at its climax, it falters. The final section is brief, slow, and disjointed, as both the heartbeat and melodic theme fall apart. Of special note, the tempi for each section, and thus the heartbeat motif, is tied to various human heart rates: resting, excited, dangerously high, and dangerously low.

Over the years, many of my gay male friends have shared pictures or videos of themselves on social media as children that made clear that they weren’t like the other boys. The boys in these photos might be posing glamorously for the camera, trying on lipstick, or simply prancing around the living room – something that their older selves would lovingly recognize as early signs of their nascent colorful identities. For me, it was a video on my dad’s camcorder of me doing a jazz hands-heavy song-and-dance routine to *Sweet Georgia Brown*. Of course, at that age, we didn’t know what we were yet. We were just being ourselves: sweet, silly, and unashamed. *Little Drama Queen* (2025) is a collection of vignettes celebrating those precious moments, before we felt judgment from others – or from ourselves. The first movement, *Talkative*, conveys the breathless excitement of a precocious and loquacious little boy. In the second movement, *Twirling*, the glittering gestures in the saxophone and piano conjure the image of a boy spinning simply for his own enjoyment. In the third movement, a little boy tiptoes to his mother’s closet; when he tries on her heels, he is suddenly imbued with glamour and confidence. And in the final movement, a raucous Gershwin-esque romp, a little boy performs a showstopping dance number with flair and pizzazz.

About the Performers

Saxophonist **Nick May** is recognized as “a highly expressive, virtuosic, and fresh performer” (David Del Tredici, Pulitzer Prize and Grammy winner) whose artistry “knows no boundaries, neither technically nor emotionally” (*AM:plified Magazine*). Since making his solo debut at eighteen with the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra, he has established an international profile with performances across the United States, Singapore, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark, including multiple solo appearances at Carnegie Hall. May is frequently featured as a soloist with orchestras and contemporary music ensembles, among them the La Porte County Symphony Orchestra, Arapahoe Philharmonic Orchestra, Omaha Symphony Orchestra, Tallgrass Chamber Choir, the University of Iowa Center for New Music Ensemble, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Orchestra and Wind Ensemble. His collaborations span many of today’s leading and emerging composers—Jennifer Higdon, Kevin Day, Rex Isenberg, Ingrid Stölzel, Spencer Arias, Stuart Beatch, and Iván Enrique Rodríguez among them—resulting in numerous premieres and a growing catalog of works written for him, underscoring his deep commitment to expanding the expressive and artistic potential of the saxophone. A committed chamber musician, May is a founding member of Latitude 39, a trio with violinist Diana Seitz and pianist Maya Tulyieva dedicated to programming that bridges Turkmen, Ukrainian, and Azerbaijani traditions with contemporary repertoire. Their upcoming releases on Navona Records further expand the ensemble’s presence in the global new music landscape. May’s critically acclaimed discography includes releases on Neuma and Albany Records, with forthcoming recordings as a featured soloist with conductor Dr. Todd Nichols and the Eastern Wind Symphony (Mark Custom Records). His debut album, *Tone Studies: The Saxophone Music of David Maslanka*, helped establish his reputation as an interpreter of major contemporary works. Additional appearances include *The Chamber Music of David von Kampen* and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Jazz Orchestra’s *The Good Life*. As the founder of the I Exist Project, May leads an innovative artistic initiative that celebrates queer life, culture, and creativity through performance, collaboration, and the commissioning of new repertoire. His album *You, Me, Us* was praised by *AM:plified Magazine* for its “dialogue about visibility... music that fights, heals, and celebrates,” affirming his role as an artist whose work blends activism with musical expression. His advocacy-driven collaborations extend to leading queer cultural institutions – including NoDivide KC, LA Pride, and the Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America, among others – as well as to upcoming work honoring the legacy of icons Harvey Milk, Julian Eltinge, and Billy Strayhorn, reflecting a commitment to community impact, representation, and creative partnership at a national level. A sought-after educator, May has given masterclasses, performances, and residencies at major conservatories and universities including the Manhattan School of Music, the Peabody Institute, Harvard University, UC Davis, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Denison University, the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and the University of Oklahoma, among numerous others. His teaching and lecturing cover performance, collaboration, entrepreneurship, and LGBTQ studies. He holds degrees from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (B.M.) and the University of Kansas (M.M.). Nick May is an endorsing artist for Key Leaves and Légère Reeds and performs on Yanagisawa saxophones. www.nickmaysax.com

Born and raised in Hong Kong, pianist **Alex Siu Lun Li** is based in Kansas City, where he combines different music and presentation media to connect composers with audiences. Alex holds two Master’s degrees from the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), one in solo piano and one in collaborative piano. He is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) in piano performance at UMKC. As a collaborative pianist, Alex frequently coaches and performs with singers and instrumentalists both in and out of conservatories settings. Recent projects include the I Exist Project with saxophonist Nick May, bringing music by LGBTQ+ composers to more than twenty universities and conservatories around the United States, including the Manhattan School of Music and Peabody Institute. In addition to piano, Alex also plays the harpsichord and the organ. Beyond music, Alex enjoys mathematics, sudokus, coding, crafting, designing, writing, teaching, and learning languages.

About the I Exist Project

The I Exist Project amplifies the richness and diversity of queer life, culture, and artistry by partnering with a broad spectrum of talented queer composers and performers. Our mission is to inspire the creation of innovative queer repertoire that celebrates the unique experiences and voices within our community, fostering greater understanding, connection, and visibility for all. Current collaborators, comprised of emerging and leading composers of our time, with diverse queer identities and backgrounds include: Spencer Arias, Stuart Beatch, Philip Blackburn, Kevin Day, Claire Eckstein, Darius Edwards, Nathan Froebe, Keaton Garrett, Tyler Harrison, Jennifer Higdon, Rex Isenberg, Xenia St. Charles, Iris Llyllyth, Trey Makler, Zachery Meier, Nebal Maysaud, Aaryn S. Ricucci-Hill, Iván Rodríguez, Ingrid Stölzel, Zoë Wallace, Anne Q. Wang, Sebastian Zhang, and more. In the face of recent heart-wrenching acts of targeted violence, ongoing attempts by legislatures to undermine queer rights, and the continued dehumanization endured by transgender folx, the pursuit of this project becomes even more essential. It stands as a resolute testament to the strength and unity of our community, boldly asserting that our existence will not be diminished or silenced.

For more information:



LGBTQ Resources

The Trevor Project: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/> - 24/7/365 Lifeline at 866-4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386) or TrevorChat, their online instant messaging option, or TrevorText, a text-based support option

GLAAD: <https://glaad.org/>

PFLAF: <https://pflag.org/>