



Performing Arts Series

Bella Gaia
Beautiful Earth

Kenji Williams

Bella Gaia Founder, Director, Composer, Violinist

Yumi Kurosawa

13- and 20-stringed Koto Player, Composer, Improviser, Computer Sound

Deep Singh

Tabla, Percussion, Voice

Lety ElNaggar

Saxophone, Nay

Irina Akulenko

Dance

Kristin Hoffmann

Vocals, Keyboard

Läle Sayoko

Dance

Thursday, November 3, 2011

Yardley Hall

Johnson County Community College

**Sponsored in part by the
JCCC Student Sustainability Committee**

Tonight's performance will not have an intermission.

Bella Gaia

Beautiful Earth

Inspired by astronauts who spoke of the life-changing power of seeing the Earth from space, award-winning filmmaker, composer and violinist Kenji Williams created Bella Gaia to simulate this transformative effect called the “Overview Effect.” Working closely with NASA’s scientific visualization studio, Bella Gaia successfully simulates space flight, taking the audience on a spectacular journey around planet Earth. With live music, performance art, large-scale projected NASA scientific visualizations and cutting-edge technology, Bella Gaia showcases a thought-provoking stream of crucial scientific data regarding our imperiled ecosystems while also celebrating the amazing cultural heritage of humanity. Bella Gaia tells the story of the Living Universe, exploring both human and natural expressions of the Living Universe through dance, data visualizations and music, and explores humanity’s ultimate challenge as we enter a new epoch called the Anthropocene, where humans become the driving force of environmental change on planet Earth.

“Bella Gaia shows you how humans and nature are connected and in turn how art and science are connected. It’s an exploration of the relationship between human civilization and our ecosystem.”

– Kenji Williams, Founder and Director, Bella Gaia, www.bellagaia.com

Program

PART I – *The Living Universe, The Living Earth*

Our Universe is alive, infinitely creative and interconnected. Our living Earth has a unique set of conditions making it habitable for human life.

PART II – *Natural and Human Expressions of the Living Universe*

Egypt and the Middle East – *Human Expressions of the Living Universe case study: Egypt and the Middle East*

Lety ElNaggar on Nay (Egyptian flute) takes us on a journey down the Nile River, one of the birth canals of civilization. Isis (Irina Akulenko), the goddess of protection, dances with a pregnant mother (Läle Sayoko) to depict the origins of belly dance – a sacred ritual to ease labor pains associated with pregnancy. A celebration of Egypt ensues. However, modern and future challenges of the Middle East region – political unrest and climate change-related heat, drought and food shortage – remind us that the destiny of humans and our planet Earth are inextricably linked. Isis is overwhelmed by the heat and fire of what is to come.

Japan – *Human Expressions of the Living Universe case study: Japan*

Over 100,000 shrines and temples can be found in Japan, all of them facing a natural landmark such as a mountain or the sun. Yumi Kurosawa performs her own compositions on the 20-stringed Koto, as we explore Japan’s cultural expressions both ancient and modern. This island nation’s dependence on nuclear energy has also created a horrific accident, endangering its future and further reminding us of our self-imposed anthropogenic (human-caused) stress.

New York City – *Human Expressions of the Living Universe case study: New York City*

The sights and sounds of New York City are depicted. New York is the capital of a global cultural experiment and the modern Industrial Age. But New York is also endangered by rising oceans from climate change, and we are reminded by the significant resources needed to feed and power our modern lifestyles, and the waste that comes with it.

Kenji Williams, composer; Lety ElNaggar, saxophone; and Kristin Hoffmann, vocals.

Water and Oceans – *Natural Expressions of the Living Universe case study: Water and Oceans*

We explore the water cycle from evaporation to water vapor and precipitation, and we explore our oceans, their complex currents and temperatures, and the beautiful life they sustain.

India – *Human Expressions of the Living Universe case study: India*

Fresh water is increasingly a scarce resource around the world, and this is clearly prevalent in India, where population, pollution, agriculture and melting Himalayan glaciers from climate change threaten underground water tables and rivers such as the Ganges River, which some scientists predict may run dry in our lifetime. The Ganges is at the heart of Indian culture, music and identity. What happens to India if the Ganges runs dry? An Indian dancer (Irina Akulenko) expresses her love for her lover (water), and her painful separation from water.

Music composed and performed by Deep Singh. Choreography by Preeti Vasudevan and Irina Akulenko.

PART III – *The Anthropocene*

We have entered a new geologic epoch in which humans are the primary force of change in the environment, called the Anthropocene (Crutzen). Is the Anthropocene a result of a worldview of the Universe and Earth, not as a living interconnected entity, but as static, unrelated and separate parts to be mined and consumed? Has humanity forgotten that our actions affect other things, on all levels?

PART IV

Planet Earth is the only place known so far to harbor life. It is the only place which we may call home.

Bios

Kenji Williams – Bella Gaia Founder, Director, Composer, Violinist

Creative director and composer Kenji Williams is an award-winning filmmaker, music producer, theatrical show director and classically trained violinist. Kenji creates a world bridge to music, visual arts, science and unique storytelling, while exploring the nexus of art and science through collaborations as diverse as NASA scientists, consciousness researcher Deepak Chopra and top world-music musicians. With over 30 years of music experience, performance, composition and production, and 20 years of film production, his current project, *Bella Gaia*, involves collaborating with institutions such as NASA, the Smithsonian and the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. In addition to public and critical acclaim, Pioneer, Panasonic and Sony corporations have sponsored Williams with technology to support his artistic vision. Combining unique skills in film and music, Williams has earned international film awards from the Canadian Society of Cinematographers, Sundance Film Festival and other organizations. He has presented *Bella Gaia* at over 80 concerts in eight countries, and at the *Economist* magazine's "World in 2011" conference, the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit and the 2010 Aspen Institute Environment Forum. He has been featured in the media from BBC radio to Japanese press, NPR, XM Radio, AV Revolution, Tricycle and Apple.com. Composer and producer of six music albums and director of 15 films and music videos, three feature length projects, three multimedia theatrical live shows and one full-dome planetarium show, Williams is respected for pushing the boundaries of audiovisual art and pioneering the convergence of art and science.

Yumi Kurosawa – 13- and 20-stringed Koto Player, Composer, Improviser, Computer Sound

Yumi is an innovative musician, born and raised in Japan. She began her study of the 13-stringed Koto at the age of 3 under her parents, Kazuo and Chikako Kurosawa. At the age of 15, Yumi began studying the 20-stringed Koto under Nanae Yoshimura. Kurosawa received first prize at the National Competition for students in 1989 and 1992, and won a scholarship from the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan in 1998. She appeared in the Prague Cello Ensemble concert at Suntory Hall, Tokyo, 1996, and in 2000 on the NHK broadcast TV program, *Genji-Wakana*. At Keio University, Yumi studied computer music, then she moved to New York in pursuit of innovative collaborations with artists and musicians. She has toured in Japan, Canada, Germany, Malaysia, Russia and the U.S. She has appeared in venues such as Apollo Sound Stage, Joe's Pub, WNYC Radio and in concert at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. Yumi released her original CD, *Beginning of a Journey*, in 2009. In 2011, Yumi appeared as the soloist for the world premiere of *Koto Concerto: Genji*, a Kyo-Shin-An Arts commissioned by composer Daron Hagen in both the Lark Quartet in New York City and with the Orchestra of the Swan in Stratford-Upon-Avon, UK. She is a member of Hougakuten Concert, Tokyo, and received her Master qualification from Seiha School (style). Visit www.yumikuro.com.

Deep Singh – Tabla, Percussion, Voice

Deep Singh has been steeped in music since a very young age. Deep grew up learning harmonium and vocal from his father, and as a young child became one of the leading disciples of the late Padma Shree Ustad Allah Rakha Khan of the Punjab Gharana, making him one of the senior-most guru-brothers of Ustad Zakir Hussain. Deep's versatility as a performer, composer, producer, Hindustani vocalist and engineer has given him a unique place in the music industry. He is proficient in many percussion instruments from many different traditions as well as harmonium, keyboards, bass guitar and beat programming. His extensive knowledge of melody and rhythm from many different world music traditions has resulted in some very innovative collaborations. As a Tabliya, Deep is one of the most sought-after performers both as a soloist and accompanist. He has shared the stage with many of the greatest world-class musicians. Visit www.myspace.com/deepsingh.

Lety ElNaggar – Saxophone, Nay

Lety ElNaggar, originally from the suburbs of Philadelphia, has been studying and performing jazz, classical, Colombian and Arabic music since moving to New York in 2008 to attend Columbia University. She performs regularly on saxophones, nay, clarinet and Western flute in several ensembles including alternative rock band MAKU Soundsystem, Colombian-jazz quintet Dilemastronauta and the New York Arabic Orchestra. Lety leads her own ensemble that performs compositions based in jazz with influences from Egyptian folk music.

Irina Akulenko – Dance

Irina Akulenko is a New York City-based performer, teacher and choreographer with a burning passion for arts of all genres. Although she discovered Middle Eastern dance purely by chance, her interest in expression started at an early age and was channeled into ballet training, piano and voice lessons as well as drawing. Belly dance became her main focus which she sustained by seeking instruction with numerous local teachers as well as visiting master performers. Since 2001, Irina has explored both Egyptian cabaret and American tribal-style belly dance and now enjoys fusing these styles as well as everything in between. Visit www.danceirina.com.

Kristin Hoffmann – Vocals, Keyboard

Kristin Hoffmann is a singer/songwriter based in New York City. She studied classical piano, guitar and opera at Juilliard and has performed all over New York, while touring with the Wallflowers, Brandi Carlile, Feist, Richie Havens and Ben Lee, among others. Kristin has performed at the Sundance Film Festival and her warm, melodious, haunting songs have been featured on several recent television shows. She is a musical spokesperson for ocean awareness and conservation with her “Song for the Ocean,” and has written songs for health-challenged children. Hoffmann is currently working with the dance group PURE, whose empowering piece *Beauty Reimagined* is set to her music. In addition to four CDs, *Spring Comes, Divided Heart, Real and The Waking*, Kristin has also released a CD of healing music, *SOL~AUM (Songs of Light)*. She is the featured singer for Bella Gaia. Visit www.kristinhoffmann.com.

Läle Sayoko – Performance Artist

Läle was one of the founding members of Japan’s famous Samanyolu professional belly dance group in Tokyo, and has since developed her own solo career touring with the United Kingdom’s Mugenkyo Taiko Drummers. Läle is traveling a 100-plus city tour encompassing the UK, Turkey’s *Baba Zula*, New York’s Bella Gaia multimedia “Earth from Space” journey show and New York’s highly respected *Zikrayat*. Her recent project is *Flying Apsaras*, a dance duo with world-renowned belly dance star Kaeshi Chai. Appearing in Japanese and American magazines and newspapers, she aspires for dance to be a powerful communicator though traditional technique and spiritual embodiment. Sayoko is eight and a half months pregnant and is dancing with her daughter. Visit www.lalesayoko.com and www.flyingapsaras.com.

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