

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Xochitl Rojas-Rocha

May 23, 2019



The Mivos Quartet. Photo by Nadine Sherman.

Live Performance Brings Music of the Sea to UC San Diego's Qualcomm Institute

Renowned string ensemble performs original score by UC San Diego students

Pulitzer Prize-nominated composer and UC San Diego music professor Lei Liang had worked with poets, painters and dancers, but never with beluga whales before he came to the university's Qualcomm Institute as its Research Artist in Residence. On Wednesday, May 29, whale song joins the chords of string instruments in a public performance of Liang's collaborative seminar "Hearing Seascapes."

“Hearing Seascapes” is an ongoing project of Liang’s that reimagines the life and sounds found in the Arctic. Told in part through the deep, resonant cracking of Arctic ice and other audio, the project stems from data collected by researchers, including Professor John Hildebrand and doctoral candidate Josh Jones at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. The May 29 performance will showcase the project in a new dimension through original music scores composed by Liang’s students in the Department of Music and the Jacobs School of Engineering, and performed by the award-winning Mivos Quartet.



Lei Liang, left, is a UC San Diego Professor of Music and the Research Artist in Residence at the Qualcomm Institute. His projects blend media, audio and original scores to immerse the audience in spectacular landscapes, from coral reefs to Arctic ecosystems.

Since its founding in 2008, the New York-based Mivos Quartet has performed contemporary music for diverse audiences at venues in Asia, Europe and South America. Recently, they won the Ursula Mamlok Prize, which is awarded to ensembles or soloists making significant contributions to the performance of new music.

Hopefully, Liang says, “Hearing Seascapes” will connect with people in a way that inspires future generations to preserve and better understand our critically important natural environments.



Participants in Liang's seminar, 'Hearing Seascapes,' rehearse for their upcoming performance.

“In a way, our homes are being destroyed. And with the technology and our creative artistic approach, perhaps there is a way we can reclaim what our home can be,” said Liang.

The “Hearing Seascapes” project is a collaborative effort between the Qualcomm Institute, which fosters innovation at the intersection of art and technology, and UC San Diego’s Jacobs School of Engineering, Department of Music and Scripps Institution of Oceanography. In a seminar-style course, students of engineering, music and the marine sciences help the participants compose music to

accompany audio captured by scientists at Scripps.

Liang says that the experience has changed how he thinks about music. In exploring the sounds of the sea with his students during the “Hearing Seascapes” seminar, he found himself asking new questions about sound and how it is perceived. For example, how would a marine animal listen and communicate through silence and sound? How does sound travel in water, he wondered?

“I have been on a path for my own music for a very long time. But it is at Qualcomm Institute where I feel like I can truly reinvent myself and in some ways, maybe re-envision what my discipline can be,” said Liang.

“Hearing Seascapes” with the Mivos Quartet will be performed in the Qualcomm Institute Auditorium in Atkinson Hall on May 29 at 6 p.m., with a reception to follow. The event is free and open to the public.

Mivos Quartet’s residency is sponsored by the UC San Diego Division of Arts and Humanities. Liang also wishes to thank his collaborator, Professor Falko Kuester of the UC San Diego Jacobs School of Engineering, and Dean Cristina Della Coletta of the Division of Arts and Humanities.



Hearing Seascapes' participants pose with Liang, their instructor.

Keep up with campus news by subscribing to *This Week @ UC San Diego*