

## New York Philharmonic Very Young Composers

**N**ilomi Weerakkody and **Mack Scocca-Ho** are two of the exceptional talents to have emerged out of the New York Philharmonic Very Young Composers (VYC) Program, through which students write original compositions and hear them performed by Philharmonic musicians and, in some cases, by the full Orchestra. Philharmonic Teaching Artists affiliated with the VYC Program, all of whom are professional composers and musicians, assist the students as mentors and scribes. Students are selected based on their enthusiasm for music, whether or not they have had previous musical training. The Teaching Artists help them tap into their innate creativity, express their musical ideas, clarify their musical options, and turn their conceptions into notated, performable compositions.

The VYC Program began in 1995 as a relatively modest after-school undertaking in several public schools around New York City. Since then, it has grown under the leadership of Artistic Director Jon Deak, former New York Philharmonic Associate Principal Bass and himself an active composer. Today, the VYC Program continues to provide after-school instruction to fourth and fifth graders under the banner of VYC Schools, and it also serves middle-school pupils through the VYC Bridge program at the Philharmonic's home in David Geffen Hall.

Every year, more than 100 new compositions by Very Young Composers are played by ensembles of Philharmonic musicians or by the full Orchestra at the Young People's Concerts for Schools. The Teaching Artists coach the students to make informed but ultimately

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### Soundscape for Orchestra

#### Nilomi Weerakkody

**Born:** June 4, 2007 in New York City

**Work composed:** 2018

**World Premiere:** January 12, 2019, at a Philharmonic Young People's Concert, Jakub Hrůša, conductor

**Estimated duration:** ca. 2 minutes



Nilomi Weerakkody is from the Bronx and a sixth grader at The Dalton School. She has been a participant in the New York Philharmonic's Very Young Composers program for two years, but explains that her love for composing began when she was in the second grade. Having played several instruments, she is now studying violin at the Bloomingdale School of Music as well as at Dalton. She says, "I love the violin for its versatility, and how I can manipulate it to sound any way that I want. Other than music, I enjoy fencing and dance. I also like to read and go hiking."

Her work is made up of four "layers," each representing a different musical idea and performed by different sections of the orchestra. After each layer is heard separately; they are then superimposed to create a soundscape. Nilomi explains:

For this piece, my inspiration was the nature that I experience every day. I started with a tune, and layered more as I went on. I love experimenting with all the different sounds of the outside world. I hope that you will enjoy the piece as much as I did.

personal decisions; every note in the finished composition is the student's. The program does not take a paint-by-numbers approach, but, rather, encourages students to follow their inspiration in the direction it leads. Said Deak:

I sometimes use a visual metaphor. It's as if we give the student a big, blank wall, and paint, and fancy brushes, but then we don't instruct them to use those things in a specific way. We might say, you could mix this color with another and see what comes out, but the students will make their own choices.

The VYC Program has given rise to affiliate initiatives in Colorado, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, as well as in 15 countries, including China, Finland, Israel, Japan, Spain, South Korea, Venezuela, and in the State of Palestine. United by their common bond of music,

the young composers communicate among themselves through musical postcards online, invariably including a live component in their messages. For example, a composer in Japan might make a video of herself playing a musical phrase and send it to a composer in Finland, who responds with a video in which he completes the phrase. In the process, both composers polish their creative skills, and in the long run they help build a worldwide community based on music.

**Instrumentation:** *Soundscape for Orchestra* calls for three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, two woodblocks, and strings. *Ociantrose* employs three flutes (one doubling piccolo), three oboes, three clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, crotales, triangle, bass drum, marimba, and strings.



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## Ociantrose

### Mack Scocca-Ho

**Born:** June 9, 2007, in Beijing, China

**Work composed:** 2019

**World Premiere:** April 14, 2019, at the *Phil the Hall* concert, Jaap van Zweden, conductor

**Estimated duration:** ca. 3 minutes

Mack Scocca-Ho was born in Beijing, but has lived in New York most of his life. He has been involved in the VYC Program since early 2018. Mack has been composing since he was three years old, when he began printing out blank staff paper and writing down music. A student at the Special Music School at the Kaufman Music Center, he plays viola and studies piano, in addition to composition. His *Ociantrose* evokes life in the capital of an imaginary country, a city whose name refers to its location near water. Mack says:

*Ociantrose* is the capital city of Myanolor, one of a group of countries that my friends and I have imagined. This piece celebrates *Ociantrose's* distinctive identity as a busy but orderly city where order is not imposed by the government, but arises from the residents. The different themes in my piece suggest the variety of people there and the harmony emerging from independence.