

# “THE HEAD HAS A LOT TO SAY”

## THE CONCEPT, THE COMMISSION, THE CREATION

“Just as each garden begins with one seed, every composition starts with a first chord - and this first chord was Sue Morris.”

- Maestro Ankush Kumar Bahl

Susan Morris is a planter of seeds that blossom into extraordinary things. In early 2022, Sue, 2020 Holland Leadership Award recipient, planted a seed, suggesting to symphony leadership that Ree and Jun Kaneko would be fitting 2023 honorees. Inspired by Ree and Jun’s incredible impact on our community, their thoughtful collaborative process, and their exceptional creativity, Maestro Ankush Kumar Bahl believed the best way to honor them was by creating art - commissioning a work to be written in honor of, and inspired by, Jun’s globally renowned artwork.

That seed flourished into both a beautiful relationship and a remarkable new composition.

Maestro Bahl initially identified several potential composers for the commission and provided Ree and Jun with audio and video clips to help them make a selection. They chose Andy Akiho, a GRAMMY®- and Pulitzer-nominated composer and percussionist based in Portland, Oregon.



“Andy was experimental, doing things we hadn’t seen or heard before. We liked that feistiness.”

- Ree Kaneko



Intrigued by the project and excited by Jun’s artwork, Andy Akiho accepted the commission and traveled to Omaha to meet the Kanekos and the Omaha Symphony team, and to hear the orchestra perform.

Andy lodged in one of Ree and Jun’s guest lofts, immersed himself in the Kaneko studio and galleries, and a fast, close friendship developed.

*“Meeting Ree and Jun at this time in my life almost feels like it was meant to be. They really are like family to me.”*

*- Andy Akiho*

During 2022, Andy resided in Omaha for about eight weeks over the course of five visits – conceptualizing, experimenting, and composing.

A composer inspired by “found sounds,” Andy would sometimes gently tap on Jun’s sculptures to hear them speak.

Gradually, with Ree and Jun’s encouragement, Andy began to experiment with different sounds using mallets, bows, and sticks.

The idea to incorporate Jun’s artwork dynamically into the composition as unique percussion instruments was born.

It became clear that a one-of-a-kind, evolutionary collaboration was underway, building toward a world premiere that would combine orchestral music and visual art in an extraordinary way.



*“The head has a lot to say.”*

*- Andy Akiho*



*“I wanted to give Andy total freedom. But if he banged on my piece with a hammer, could I keep my mouth shut and keep smiling? I wasn’t sure. But after spending a couple of hours with Andy, his concern and sensitivity gave me full understanding, so I said, ‘you can do anything.’ He hasn’t broken one piece yet.”*

*- Jun Kaneko*



“Something that Ree and Jun believe, as do I, is that these sculptures want to sing, they want to make sound... and doing so gives the sculptures a new life.”  
 - Andy Akiho



“Jun likes his artwork to shake the air around it. Andy helps explore that.”  
 - Ree Kaneko

Discussions commenced regarding the artworks to be utilized in the composition; the logistics of installing massive sculptures on the Holland Center stage; and how Andy and the Omaha Symphony’s digital team could best capture the music of Jun’s art, to ensure it would remain an integral part of the final piece, wherever performed.

The result is a rare orchestral composition that features Jun’s artworks as instruments in the orchestra – onstage, digitally, or with a combination of both, as will be done in the world premiere.





“Having Jun’s positive energy physically at the studio has been instrumental in this process. We talk about all sorts of things – art, music, and even life. One thing I find interesting are his philosophies on color and space – because as musicians, we also think about harmony, pitch, and rhythm in terms of color and space. He talks about “Ma,” the Japanese concept referring to the space between, and it has been eye-opening to find parallels between our two art forms.”

- Andy Akiho

The Omaha Symphony is honored to present the world premiere of Andy Akiho’s *Sculptures* – a work celebrating the international reputation and unparalleled artistry of Jun Kaneko and dedicated to Ree and Jun, our 2023 Holland Leadership Award recipients.

We are grateful to the Oregon Symphony in Portland, Oregon, and the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California, for signing on as consortium members for this commission. Following performances with the Oregon Symphony in the fall of 2023 and the Music Academy of the West in the summer of 2024, we know *Sculptures* will continue to find its unique place in the repertoire of orchestras throughout America and the world.

“It’s been an incredible journey, and I really feel that this kind of connection and this kind of collaboration could only happen in a place like Omaha.”

- Maestro Ankush Kumar Bahl

“It’s the most exciting thing I’ve been a part of – experiencing the crescendo of energy and love for this project.”

- Andy Akiho

“Thank you for giving us this wonderful opportunity beyond my imagination, of collaborating with Andy – the fantastic gift of my life.”

- Jun Kaneko

