



Composer Evan Ziporyn’s “In Light of Sound” will explore the sights and sounds of nature.

Courtesy Kinetic Ensemble/Standa Merhou

Kinetic Ensemble continues pushing the boundaries

By Sam Byrd
CORRESPONDENT

Kinetic Ensemble will close out its 10th anniversary at Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston on Friday with a dose of Lone Star State flare. The artist-led string ensemble will perform “Deep Rooted,” featuring the Texas premiere of “In Light of Sound” by genre-defying artist Evan Ziporyn, which Kinetic brings home from the group’s recent residency at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. There will also be a new work by composer and Sugar Land native Mason Byner.

Ziporyn’s piece, “In Light of Sound,” is divided into three movements — “Ear-idescent,” “Bird Math” and “Unraveling” — all based on the sights and sounds of nature.

“They all are inspired by the natural world, particularly with the kind of fractured symmetries that we find in the natural world, and the idea of the waves of light and

10th anniversary performance, featuring a new work and a Texas premiere, epitomizes the company’s approach to musical creativity and innovation

sound and water and air that we constantly move through and look through and hear through,” Ziporyn said.

His interest in iridescence originated with the idea that light can look differently when seen from different vantage points, such as against fabric or through water.

“I was trying to think of a way to do something that was iridescent to the ear ... that would actually be two things at once depending on where you were located,” he said.

The second movement is built around recordings of New England birds, while the third is based on the motion of water, such as tides and streams.

“The common element is the waveform,” he said. “We see light through waves, we hear sound through waves, and that gets manifested in literal waves.”

With a music history spanning back to the 1980s when he studied at Eastman School of Music, Yale University and University of California, Berkeley, Ziporyn has spent

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Restaurateur returns to steakhouse roots with King Steak

By Bao Ong
STAFF WRITER

Houston restaurants have faced a series of challenges since restaurateur Johnny Vassallo closed Mo’s ... A Place for Steaks in 2016 — Hurricane Harvey, the pandemic, surging food costs and more recently, tariffs.

What he’s hoping hasn’t changed is the demand for more steakhouses in Houston.

Vassallo started his restaurant empire in Milwaukee and currently operates three locations of Mo’s Irish Pub in the Houston area. When he opens

King Steak on Wednesday in the Galleria area, 2200 Post Oak, it’ll be a return to his steakhouse roots. This time around, his meat-centric restaurant will sport a Texas theme, no seed oils and more vegetables on the menu.

“We want to be the ‘Cheers’ of steakhouses,” Vassallo said.

Vassallo tapped veteran chef Eric Aldis as King Steak’s operating manager. He was previously the culinary director at Federal Grill and also ran several bars in Galveston.

The menu is shorter than many steakhouses, with about only 30 items between appetiz-



Yi-Chin Lee/Houston Chronicle

The menu at King Steak in the Galleria area keeps it simple, with dry aged rib-eye steaks, as well as salads, burgers and more.

ers, salads, entrées, side dishes and desserts. Customers can expect the usual array of shrimp cocktail, Caesar salads, rib-eyes and burgers.

“We wanted to keep it fairly simple so we’re able to execute each and every time,” Aldis said.

The 4,000-square-foot restaurant, which includes a large patio and private dining space, seats about 200 people. It includes some nods to Texas ranches with a cattle theme, and red, white and blue colors thrown in. Blue Bell ice cream is used for desserts.

King Steak’s aims to be a more

Steak continues on A11

Houston designer turns on ‘Texas glamour’

By Amber Elliott
STAFF WRITER

A line of fine-arts patrons, mostly between the ages of 21 and 45, snaked around the Frick Collection in New York City on Thursday evening. The crowd, dressed in floral gowns, crisp tuxedos and several pairs of velvet smoking slippers, hugged the corner parallel to Central Park, creating a scene reminiscent of the Gilded Age, when Henry Clay Frick resided in the Fifth Avenue mansion.

Though on this occasion, fashion designer and Houston native Bach Mai played host as honorary chair of the 2025 Young Fellows Ball. He swanned around the garden court fountain with American Ballet Theatre principal dancer Misty Copeland, a benefit chair. Copeland, like many in attendance, wore a dress by Mai.

“This is just a huge milestone for me. You look at the other people who have held this position. I can’t wait to see all those girls dressed in their Bach Mai in his incredible, gorgeous institution,” he said. “That Texas woman, she’s still at the heart of the brand. Feminine, exuberant glamour is so steeped in the culture there. The bulk of our clientele still comes from Texas. So really, we’re bringing Texas glamour to the Frick.”

He brought some Texans, too. Kaleta Blaffer Johnson, a fellow Houstonian who attended St. John’s School with Mai, served on this year’s benefit committee.

“I got my start making dresses for my fellow classmates, friends and cousins for their cotillions and proms,” Mai said. “My first runway show was St. John’s in the theater. I was just back in Houston because I received their Maverick Award.”

Approximately 750 guests attended the 2025



George Koelle/BFA

The 2025 Young Fellows Ball was held at the Frick Collection in New York City.

Young Fellows Ball, marking the annual spring benefit event’s inaugural return to the museum since its grand reopening and the completion of its multi-year renovation. The Frick Collection, and its ball, previously took up residence in the Breuer building on Madison Avenue.

“We have the availability to accommodate more guests. In the past, somewhere between 500-600 attended,” said Angie Calderwood, associate director of development for the Frick. “We have a second floor now that’s open to the public to see a new suite of galleries installed in the former living spaces to display the art in more of a human scale. It lets you appreciate smaller works and get up close and personal. The rooms downstairs are much grander, with tall ceilings. They’re meant to impress.”

Ballgoers were able to ascend the Frick’s grand staircase for the first time. Calderwood anticipated that spot would be the night’s most Instagrammable spot. She was right.

A VIP dinner hosted in the penthouse terrace of the Frick Art Research Li-



Matteo Prandoni/BFA.com
Alexandra Longanecker



Matteo Prandoni/BFA.com
Misty Copeland



Matt Borkowski/BFA.com
Daria Strokous

brary, founded more than 100 years ago by Henry Clay Frick’s daughter, Helen, was added to the Young Fellows Ball festivities this year — another first. Bucherer Fine Jewellery hosted an inaugural VIP lounge in the Frick’s new café, the Westmoreland, which opens to the public June 6.

“Our young fellows group has exploded in the past few months, everyone has been really excited about the reopening and seeing the spaces. In 2022, we rebounded from the pandemic and got to an all-

time high of 400 households, now we’re almost at 900,” Calderwood said. “It’s grown informally out of a fellows program started in 1970. Their first event was held in 1993 as a benefit for the museum, but not as the formalized ball we know today, until 2000. The first one was the Edwardian Ball; the theme has always revolved around some sort of exhibition.”

Thursday celebrated the reopening installation, “Porcelain Garden: Vladimir Kanevsky,” a commissioned series of lifelike

porcelain sculptures as an homage to the bouquets on display for the Frick’s initial opening back in 1935, after Henry Clay Frick bequeathed his mansion and collection of European paintings, sculpture and decorative arts for public enjoyment. Calderwood explained that fresh flowers are now a no-no for conservation reasons.

“We’re not a house museum, but we’ve preserved that feeling. You can see and imagine what it would’ve been like to live in this Gilded Age mansion, which has been lov-

ing and painstakingly restored to its original state. It’s different from the New York City experience,” she said. “Like the Boucher Room and Anteroom, in that particular gallery the paintings were originally in the second floor in Mrs. Frick’s boudoir. When we knew that we were opening the second floor, we were able to open those rooms as they were, with parquet floors. It’s very special. Moments like that, where you walk in and imagine yourself in a different time, is what people have responded to.”

Mai doesn’t recall his first visit to the Frick, though his undergraduate thesis collection was inspired by some of the museum’s Rococo artworks. Blaffer Johnson wore a floral riff of one of those early designs to the ball.

“We have both always loved the Fragonard Room,” she said.

Mai began making clothes at age 15. After studying at Parsons School of Design at the New School and under Oscar de la Renta, he worked for John Galliano at Maison Margiela in Paris.

“It was always a goal to move back and become an American designer,” he said. “In 2019, I joined the Young Fellows and was happy to be part of the community of young philanthropists excited about art. It’s been a dream of mine to be the fashion chair; I put it on my vision board when I thought about starting my own brand. What better year than coming back to the mansion? It’s kind of like coming home. I share this with the other Young Fellows and steering committee, as a new era for the museum and showing a newer, younger diverse face. The Frick is one of the most storied and traditional institutions of the Upper East Side. To show that there’s a place for everyone is really important.”

KINETIC

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decades performing with some of the most talented, progressive groups, which makes his adoration and respect for his time with Kinetic something of note.

“The group is great. I loved working with them,” he said, “It was everything I had hoped for, and I very seldom feel so well represented so quickly in an artistic collaboration after the first set of rehearsals. I knew that my music was in very good hands, and that was a very nice feeling to have.”

Recognition for innovation

During the last decade, Kinetic has gained increasing recognition as an innovative force in Houston’s music scene and an important advocate for the diversification of classical music repertoire.

One of those talents represented in its support of up-and-coming artists is Bynes, whose piece “Gallop” was informed by

her school-age hobby of composing musical telegrams for friends and classmates.

She recounted that her high school choir would sell singing valentines as a fundraiser, which sparked her interest in music and eventually gave way to her interest in composition.

“I would mash an old song and a new song so that classmates and teachers would buy it,” she said. “I arranged a song for my friends, and I’d accompany us on guitar. It was such a great foundation, aurally, for me as a composer, to become good at listening. It also allowed me to try out weird ideas or fun ideas and see how people were receptive to them.”

Interestingly, since the orchestra’s name is Kinetic, which is also a type of energy in motion, Bynes’ piece references a different kind of energy: potential energy, or stored energy. She compares it to the anticipation coursing through a horse just before it breaks from a race gate.

“If you think about a horse that’s within the holding place



Courtesy of Kinetic Ensemble
Giancarlo Latta

before they start a race, they are trying to break out of that space,” she said. “With the way our world is right now, I feel that it is a metaphor for what we’re all feeling right now. We are trying to break free, bound, gallop, soar and leap towards someone, something, someplace that’s free.”

Also on the setlist is the world premiere of Giancarlo Latta’s “Orbital” as well as Benjamin Britten’s “Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge,



Matao Aric Photography
Mason Bynes

Op. 10,” which is reprised from Kinetic’s first season 10 years ago.

Across the country

In that time span, the organization has found its stride as an undeniable presence in music-making. In its nascence, 16 musicians at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music put on a string orchestra concert without a conductor, testing the waters of collaboratively driven music-making.

‘DEEP ROOTED’

When: 7:30 p.m. Friday
Where: Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston, 3400 Main
Details: \$15-\$30, kineticensemble.org

Since then, it has released five recordings, including a self-titled disc that debuted at No. 1 on Billboard’s Traditional Classical charts. It has coordinated more than 20 composer collaborations, more than 30 premieres and commissions and more than 50 performances across the Houston region and beyond, including Austin, New York and Massachusetts.

By doing so, Kinetic has not only provided dynamic programming; it has also opened a space for young talent who haven’t broken out yet, especially communities of color and female composers who are still honing their craft.

This Friday’s performance marks the culmination of 10 years spent enhancing Houston’s cultural vibrancy.

STEAK

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modern steakhouse with a bigger emphasis on vegetables, with a half-dozen salad options and a \$25 vegetable charcuterie board with artichoke carpaccio, beet prosciutto, pickled cauliflower and heirloom carrots.

The restaurant also makes it a point to advertise that it uses beef tallow for frying, as it focuses on “clean, premium ingredients.”

The updated (and less meat heavy) menu reflects how customers’ dining habits have changed in recent years, Vassallo said.

While he believes steakhouses are still in demand, he adds that he’s seen more people drinking less and being more

mindful about their portion sizes and what they eat.

“People are still dining out, but they’re also more conscientious,” Vassallo said.

Mo’s ... A Place for Steaks, which took over when Bob’s Steak & Chop House closed in 2008 off Post Oak, was closing in on its 10-year anniversary when the restaurant’s landlords decided to demolish the property for a new project, Vassallo said.

In its first year, however, former Houston Chronicle restaurant critic Alison Cook described Mo’s as a restaurant that had a “welcoming, genuine attitude that seems unusually right for Houston and plenty of early buzz.”

Vassallo said he’s betting on King Steak capturing the same allure.



Yi-Chin Lee/Houston Chronicle

King Steak is located on Post Oak Boulevard in the Galleria area.