UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE
Department of Music presents

Visual Symphony 2026

Original Audiovisual Screening Series
Filmmakers + Composers + Visual Artists
Produced by Monstar Wanying Cao

November 13–20, 2026
Opening: Friday, November 13, 7:30 P.M.
Looping screenings: November 14, 19 & 20
UCR INTS 1128 & UCR ARTS Downtown

PROGRAM

The Azure Sanctuary / Voyage to the Moon
Heron Zhao, *music*
Yijia Sun, *illustration*

Omen of the Wheel / Bird in a Cage
Monstar Wanying Cao, *music*
Ruohan Huang, *illustration*

Pigeons Invade the City
Ziwei Tang, *AI-generated image series, created using Gemini*
Yunqi Li, *music*

Ongoing Audio Visual Exploration
Claudia Shi, *music and visuals*

Counting Blades
Micaela Randolph, *film*
Xiaowei Cao, *music*

Unmoored
jj_disaster, *visuals*
Andrew CS, *music and sound*
Angela Mai and Yama Li, *vocals*
Photosensitivity warning: flashing lights

Pune Metamorphosis: Shiva's Resonance (2024)
Paulo C. Chagas, *Ambisonics audiovisual composition*

Rust in Sand (问沙寻伎)
Cong Le, *director*
Lufei Huang, *dance*
Monstar Wanying Cao, *music*

Call Me When You Grow Up

Cartee Wang, *director*
Monstar Wanying Cao, *music*

Fortune House

Exa Huang, *director*
Jiawei Shen and Tim Juliano, *music*

Ashes

Yuan Cao, *director*
Monstar Wanying Cao, *music*

PROGRAM NOTES

The Azure Sanctuary / Voyage to the Moon

Yijia Sun is a professional illustrator who graduated from the Illustration Department at Ringling College of Art and Design. The two artworks presented in this exhibition were created in collaboration with a friend as visual backgrounds for her music video. The first depicts a dreamlike blue forest with a hidden shrine and small cat spirits, while the second features a majestic waterfall beneath a bright full moon, accompanied by a flying fish boat.

Through deep blue and teal tones, Sun creates a tranquil, atmospheric world that complements the emotions of the music. Her artistic practice focuses on using color and lighting to construct narrative spaces, often incorporating small creatures to bring life to her environments. Through this collaboration, she hopes to offer audiences an immersive audiovisual experience that highlights the connection between visual art and music.

Heron Zhao is a passionate composer, sound designer, and dulcimer player. In 2024, Zhao's collaboration with visual artist Caien Huang, *The Story of #*, was featured in the Visual Symphony exhibition at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London. In 2025, Zhao served as audio director and composer for the indie game *Feather land*, released in July 2026, and in 2026 as sound designer for the indie games *Desk Rumble* and *TOHOTOPIA*, both now available on Steam.

Omen of the Wheel / Bird in a Cage

From the composer: Inspired by a mysterious, silver-haired figure overlooking a clock-like structure, *Omen of the Wheel* explores the passage of time, the uncertainty of fate, and the presence of an unknown force. The music begins with an ethereal and mysterious atmosphere, gradually unfolding into something eerie and unsettling before culminating in an epic finale. Through this

transformation, the piece evokes a world where time, destiny, and the supernatural intertwine.

From the illustrator: While the owner is away, the cage is accidentally knocked over by a cat. The little bird inside has no way to save itself and can only let death and despair inch closer. In this commission, I explored the backstory of the protagonist—the girl in the image—and chose the last scene of her life. The dark red carpet and pale fabric set a tone that evokes death. The bars of the cage and the beaded chain create visual leading lines, while the disc-like cage structure makes her seem like she's on Death's plate, powerless against her inevitable fate. I hope these choices, while staying true to the character, deliver a strong visual and emotional impact—and also prompt some reflection on irresponsible pet ownership.

Monstar Wanying Cao is an award-winning composer, pianist, and media artist, currently a Ph.D. candidate in Digital Composition at the University of California, Riverside. Her creative work explores film scoring, audiovisual storytelling, and the intersection of music and emerging technologies. She is the co-founder and curator of Visual Symphony, an international interdisciplinary platform dedicated to fostering creative collaborations between composers, filmmakers, and visual artists. Her artistic practice bridges contemporary composition, multimedia production, and cross-disciplinary experimentation.

Ruohan Huang is a freelance illustrator and a graduate of Ringling College of Art and Design. When working on commissions, her favorite part is exploring the protagonist's backstory, identifying a meaningful moment, and capturing it through a distinctive visual language.

For this exhibition, she selected one of her favorite commissioned pieces and, with the client's permission, collaborated with a producer friend to present it in a new audiovisual format. She hopes the final result will allow audiences to experience the unique beauty that emerges when visual art and sound come together.

Pigeons Invade the City

From the artist: Pigeon Invasion originates in the artist's observations of urban pigeons during her time in the UK. Created using Gemini image-generation, the series introduces pigeons into familiar settings, including UCLH, IKEA, GAIL's, and the London Overground, transforming everyday environments into sites of absurd interspecies encounters. Although pigeons inhabit the city extensively, their presence remains subject to human conventions of hygiene, function, and acceptable behaviour. As they enter spaces organised around healthcare, consumption, and transit, the usually unremarked allocation of space becomes visible. Moving between humour and unease, the work examines the human-centred order of urban life, turning "invasion" itself into a question: who is entitled to claim a space as their everyday world, and to define another species' presence as a transgression?

From the composer: Pigeons Invade the City is a playful musical portrayal of an unexpected takeover of the urban landscape. Through lively rhythms, energetic melodies, and humorous musical gestures, the piece captures the chaotic yet charming movements of pigeons as they flutter, wander, and gather throughout the city. What begins as a few scattered birds gradually becomes a lively invasion, transforming familiar streets and rooftops into their playground. Beneath its humorous character, the piece invites listeners to reconsider the relationship between humans and nature, reminding us that cities are shared spaces filled with life, movement, and unexpected surprises.

Ziwei Tang holds a BA (Hons) in Fine Art from Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, and is currently based in Beijing. Working across artistic practice, independent research, and writing, her work engages with posthumanist discourse, exploring the possibility of moving beyond the anthropocentric frameworks of understanding consciousness, and approaching the perceptual modes and experiential worlds of the non-human.

Her work has been shortlisted for the Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition. She is the co-founder and co-curator of

Visual Symphony, an interdisciplinary art project bringing together visual artists, moving-image creators, and music composers, with exhibitions presented in London and California.

Yunqi Li is a contemporary Chinese composer and a Doctor of Musical Arts (D.M.A.) candidate who was selected as a Houston Composer Fellow for the Texas New Music Festival (TNMF). Her work often bridges the gap between acoustic composition, music education, and electronic music.

Ongoing Audio Visual Exploration

The piece is part of an ongoing audiovisual work that explores the artist's synesthesia over sound and vision, inspired by her intuition and emotions. At the heart of Claudia's practice is an ongoing investigation into the fusion of her music and visual art—specifically how melody, notes, emotions, colors, shapes, and scales interact to create embodied sensory experiences. Claudia's music allows her to soar above the canvas, unbound. Through the use of digital techniques, Claudia brings her imagination to life in real time, transforming it into a performance that evolves on-site, inviting the audience to engage directly with the energy of the work.

Claudia Shi is an artist working across moving image, sound, and expanded cinema, guided by synthetic intuition and emotion. Holding a PhD and MFA, she has been admitted to the Royal College of Art; she has studied, worked, and conducted research at Peking University, the School of Visual Arts, Cornell University, Princeton University, and Indiana University.

Projects she has contributed to have been exhibited and presented at Hauser & Wirth, MoMA, Columbia University, UCCA Lab, CAFA Art Museum, the Singapore Biennale and Singapore Art Museum, and other international venues. Projects to which she has contributed have been featured in *The New York Times*, *Frieze*, *ArtReview*, *Artnet News*, *Hyperallergic*, and *The Financial Times*.

Her publication has appeared in a journal held in research collections such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Thomas J.

Watson Library and Yale University. She has been invited to speak at institutions and has also taught and independently led seminars in programs involving Cornell University, Peking University, and LSE.

Claudia's practice includes contributions to institutionally supported exhibitions, public programs, and interdisciplinary projects, with presentations and initiatives supported by organizations and funders including NYSCA, the Terra Foundation for American Art, and other leading cultural institutions.

Counting Blades

From the filmmaker: Counting Blades is a mixed-media stop-motion video inspired by the idea of "counting sheep." Serving as an ode to my sleep paralysis, the piece replicates my perspective before I try to sleep. I count how many times my fan spins, but instead of falling into a deep sleep, I am met with hallucinations conjured up by my subconscious. It currently has no sound to accompany it, so I would love to see someone else's interpretation in that realm.

From the composer: dream repeats in nebulous ways; reality repeats in nebulous ways.

Micaela Randolph is a Theatre, Film, and Digital Production (TFDP) student at the University of California, Riverside.

Xiaowei Cao (b. 1999) is an artist, currently getting his Ph.D. in Music Composition and Technology at the University of Florida. He works with repetition, texts, and products of the internet culture.

Unmoored

Photosensitivity warning: flashing lights.

A white-on-black, particle-system-based work that is the result of a collaboration with Yama Li on her piece *Mist Migration*. Focusing not on what a video looks like, but instead on the forms

that it represents and the places they take you. The piece captures what it's like to be floating, to be caught in the in-between, and the mental experience of being adrift. Featuring music and sound by Andrew CS, and vocals by Angela Mai and Yama Li.

jj_disaster (JJ LaDue) is an LA-based new media artist and creative technologist. Their work, spanning visual art, live visuals, system design, interactive/immersive installation, and more, investigates structure, form, and minimalism, focusing on the intuitive connection between the technological interface and the art that it produces, highlighting the elegance of the forms that exist hidden inside of the digital medium. It forcefully transports the viewer into endearing, familiar, alien digital spaces that remain unrecognizable. Their process focuses on real-time computing, holding the emotional connection to the software as dear as the work that it produces. They represent the visual half of audiovisual group J-word. They've showcased work at tiat, Water & Power, Spectra Studio, Cevera Yoon, and many works at CalArts, where they currently study Creative Computing (grad. 2028).

Pune Metamorphosis: Shiva's Resonance (2024)

Pune Metamorphosis: Shiva's Resonance explores the interplay between sacred and secular sound worlds within the urban landscape of Pune, India, focusing on sonic environments surrounding two Shiva temples on the city's outskirts. The work integrates ambisonic soundscapes and 3D video recordings made in 2019, creating an immersive audiovisual experience.

The piece unfolds as a multidimensional soundscape in which human activity, animal life, environmental sound, and urban technologies coexist within an evolving spatial field shaped by architecture and temporal flow. A secondary sonic layer uses granular synthesis to transform the original recordings, foregrounding non-conscious processes of sound perception and interactions between human and non-human agencies.

The visual component engages directly with the recorded locations, highlighting spatial movement, technical mediation, and human presence. The work is presented in binaural format and remains adaptable to ambisonic performance.

Paulo C. Chagas is an internationally recognized composer and Distinguished Professor of Composition at the University of California, Riverside. His catalogue includes over 230 works spanning orchestral, chamber, electroacoustic, and audiovisual media. His compositions explore the intersections of sound, space, technology, and human experience, often integrating electronics, spatial audio, and artificial intelligence. He holds a PhD in Musicology from the Université de Liège and previously served as sound director and composer-in-residence at the WDR Electronic Studio in Cologne. His works have been performed internationally, and he serves on the board of the International Computer Music Association (ICMA).

Rust in Sand (问沙寻伎)

Inspired by the ancient murals of Dunhuang, *Rust in Sand* imagines painted figures coming to life through contemporary dance, visual storytelling, and music. Directed by Cong Le, the film explores the intersection of cultural memory and modern artistic expression, transforming static imagery into a living audiovisual experience. The original score by Monstar Wanying Cao blends Chinese instrumental timbres, electronic textures, and contemporary cinematic techniques, creating a dialogue between ancient cultural traditions and modern musical imagination.

Cong Le is a young director born in Beijing, China. She graduated in 2026 with an MA in Performance: Screen from Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London. Her work explores social issues, particularly those concerning women and children. Through visually compelling imagery and imaginative world-building, she often situates contemporary social phenomena within dystopian narratives, encouraging audiences to reflect on pressing social issues. Her short films have been selected for dozens of international film festivals, with some inspiring

academic exchanges and collaborations between universities. As a curator, she focuses on experimental filmmaking and music creation. She served as the curator and main coordinator of Visual Symphony 2025.

Call Me When You Grow Up

From the director: I came up with this story while thinking about growing up, memories, and the people we leave behind. Sometimes, when we move to a new place, we find things that remind us of people we haven't seen or talked to in a long time. I wanted to tell a simple story with a little mystery and emotion.

Call Me When You Grow Up follows May, a young girl who has just moved into a new home. While unpacking her things, she finds an old photograph of herself with another young girl. On the back of the photo, she discovers a phone number. She starts writing a message but hesitates before sending it. Suddenly, her phone rings, and the number is the same one written on the photograph.

Through this film, I wanted to explore memories, growing up, and how the past can unexpectedly become part of our present.

Cartee Wang is an international student from Qingdao, China, currently in her senior year studying Theatre, Film, and Digital Production at the University of California, Riverside. She is passionate about acting, filmmaking, and storytelling. Through her work in film production and performance, she continues to explore different approaches to cinema. She hopes to create films with a sense of beauty, harmony, and compelling narratives.

Fortune House

In the late nineteenth century, as the first waves of Asian immigrants arrived in North America, newspapers and political cartoons often portrayed them as grotesque monsters. Turning a community into something feared and inhuman made exclusion easier to justify; before people could be removed, they first had to be dehumanized.

Inspired by these historical images, *Fortune House* reimagines the immigrant experience as a contemporary fable. Set in a near-future Los Angeles, the film follows an undocumented Chinese delivery driver who stumbles into a restaurant run by demons and is forced to gamble for his place in America through a supernatural game of mahjong. Blending magical realism with dark humor, the film transforms the anxieties, compromises, and hidden transactions of immigrant survival into a Faustian bargain, asking a single question: when the powerless are forced to negotiate with a system rigged against them, what do they have left to put on the table?

Exa Huang is a Los Angeles–based director and producer whose work combines intimate realism with contemporary genre sensibilities to explore underground subcultures, immigrant identities, and marginalized communities. An American Film Institute Conservatory graduate, Huang previously worked as a director and creative at VICE and in development and acquisitions at Valhalla Entertainment. Her narrative short *I HATE LOVE* received support from The Chimaera Project. Her documentary short *JUST ANOTHER DAY* was recognized by the Montreal Independent Film Festival and Independent Shorts Awards, while *STRANGER IN PARADISE* screened at queer film festivals in Berlin, Shanghai, and London.

Her commercial and editorial work includes commissions and features for GQ, Burberry, Nike, NOWNESS, The Face, Marshall, and Shanghai Fashion Week. She is currently developing narrative projects centered on diaspora, labor, and contemporary Asian underground culture.

Jiawei Shen is a Los Angeles–based composer and producer for film, television, and theatre. A composer rooted in Eastern philosophy, he works with the energy of the story, respecting the natural flow of a scene, and uses restraint. His hybrid scores blend orchestral writing, electronic sound design, jazz, and Chinese traditional instruments. He provided the music arrangement for Bi Gan's *Resurrection*, which won the Special Award at the 78th Cannes Film Festival. He is a recipient of the 2025 BMI/Jerry

Goldsmith Film Scoring Scholarship. He also founded the Chinese Composer Community. (jiaweishen.com)

Tim Juliano is a Los Angeles–based composer whose work spans feature documentary, television, interactive media, and production music. Since relocating to Los Angeles, he has contributed music to feature-length documentaries, television series, virtual reality experiences, and national broadcast campaigns. His credits include work for Discovery+, Digital Domain, Sandia National Laboratories, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the University of New Mexico, as well as ongoing composition for APM Music across multiple catalogs. He records live musicians at major studios and delivers music within broadcast and studio production pipelines. (composingthescore.com)

Ashes

From the director: The film is a psychological drama that examines the complexities of motherhood, mental health, and individual responsibility. It challenges the idealized image of the selfless mother and portrays a woman who is pushed towards desperation by postpartum depression, familial oppression, and economic hardship. Rather than having a single villain, it explores how individual choices blur the boundaries between guilt, responsibility, and victimhood.

Furthermore, the film is also about the power of speaking out. The protagonist's journey from being questioned and judged to reclaiming her voice becomes an act of resistance against the horrible fate that's imposed upon her.

We do not seek to offer easy answers or moral judgments. Instead, I hope to create an intimate and unsettling experience that invites the audiences to look beyond the label of "mother," confront the human suffering hidden beneath it, and question the system that allows such suffering to persist. Ultimately, we want her story to be not simply understood, but impossible to ignore.

Yuan Cao is a Chinese director/filmmaker currently studying for his MFA Filmmaking degree at New York Film Academy in Los

Angeles. Drawn to psychological drama and suspense, he is interested in stories that explore the complexities of human nature, interpersonal relationships, and moral ambiguity. His work is usually driven by characters with contradictory personalities, and often explores the emotional and psychological forces behind seemingly irreversible choices.

VISUAL SYMPHONY 2026 SCREENINGS

November 13, Friday, 7:30 P.M.
OPENING SCREENING
CHASS Interdisciplinary Screening Room, INTS 1128

November 14, Saturday, 7:30–10:00 P.M.
LOOPING SCREENING
CHASS Interdisciplinary Screening Room, INTS 1128

November 14, Saturday
LOOPING SCREENING
UCR ARTS Downtown, Gallery Theater

November 19, Thursday & November 20, Friday
LOOPING SCREENINGS
UCR ARTS Downtown, Gallery Theater

Instagram: @art_visualsymphony
artvisualsymphony@gmail.com

Visual Symphony website

PRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Monstar Wanying Cao, *Lead Producer & Co-Founder*
Cartee Wang and Laura Hogg, *Event Photographers*

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