



REDCAT

A MORE CONVENIENT SEASON

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 2014, 8:30 PM

SUNDAY, JANUARY 26, 2014, 3:00 PM

presented by

REDCAT

Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater

California Institute of the Arts

CaLARTS

A MORE CONVENIENT SEASON

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2014, 8:30pm

Sunday, Jan. 26, 2014, 3:00pm

Composed by Yotam Haber

PROGRAM

I. Timing

II. Questions

III. Negative Peace/Positive Peace

Pamela Walbert Montanaro, text as interviewed by Cynthia Levinson in her book *We've Got A Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March*

Philip White, electronic music

David Petersen, film

Commissioned by architect and philanthropist Tom Blount

Co-produced by the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center and The Herb Alpert School of Music at CalArts

THE CALARTS ORCHESTRA

Christine Tivolacci, piccolo; Jennifer Ingertila, flute; Bom An, oboe; Joe Thel, English horn; Ernesto Cruz, clarinet/bass clarinet; Brian Walsh, bass clarinet/contrabass clarinet; Jon Stehney, bassoon; Chris Foss, contrabassoon; Rachel O'Connor, Erin Poulin, Adam Wolf, Adrian Dunker, horns; David Aguila, Jessica Waithe, trumpets in Bb; Kevin Taylor, trombone; Matt Barbier, bass trombone; Mike Gilleran, tuba; Kelly Furniss, timpani; Ben Goldman, Dalia Berman, percussion; Emilio Cuenca, piano/celeste; Alison Bjorkedal, harp; Yu-Ting Wu, Radu Paponui, Mona Tian, Ava Burtch, Caid Jones, Blake Pouliot, Kevin Lin, Lizzie Edwards, violin 1; Stephanie Moorehouse, Jonathan Tang, Kris Rahamad, Andrew Tholl, Orin Hildestad, Maite Sandoval, Emily Call, violin 2; Hunter Harris, Morgan, Marlow Fisher, Alessandra Barrett, Linnea Powell, Georgi Dimitrov, viola; Min Lee, Thea Mesirov, Linda Rife, Jarrett Furst, Derek Stein, cello; Charlie Carswell, Jay Rubottom, Gabo Golden, Marlon Martinez, bass

THE CALARTS CHORALE

Soloists: Quayla Bramble, Kelliann Wright, Sara Gomez, Sharon Kim

Soprano 1: Braille Babcock, Ting-ju Chen, Maclaine Fiori, Stephanie Aston,
Chelsea Avram, Lauren Davis, Anyana Haviv, Kelsey Springsted, Suzanne Waters
Soprano 2: Arielle Deem, Samantha Hopkins, Natalie Perez, Anastasia Glasheen,
Erinn Horton, Melissa Montanez, Courtney Taylor, Laura Anderson

Alto 1: Drew Corey, Mungai Karungari, Lenka Shockley, Amy Arms, Christine Morse,
Melissa Treinkman, Argenta Walther, Jett Kelly, Sarah Lynch, Adriana Manfredi,
Kattie Bachar

Alto 2: Nailah Middleton, Ruth Odukoya, Elisa Rosin, Lauren Segó, Tuzy Ellis,
Amber Erwin, Kristen Toedtman

Mark Menzies, conductor

Adriana Manfredi, chorus master

Emi Tamura, electronic media operator

Drew Corey, chorus assistant

ABOUT THE WORK

The dramatic arc to *A More Convenient Season*, a work falling between an oratorio and an opera, was conceived after I spent time in Birmingham and spoke with a diverse cross-section of the city's citizens: young and old, black and white, Christians and Jews, people who were heroes and foot soldiers in the Civil Rights Movement, as well as those who did not experience those years of turmoil. Nearly every person I met told me the same thing: We've had enough images of dogs and water hoses, and it is time to have hope, to celebrate Birmingham for the strides she has made, and for her shining future. I've tried to write a piece that moves from that dark, fear-filled time to a brighter present.

Usually, when a composer is commissioned to write an orchestral work, he is not told much more than the instruments he will have at his disposal and the duration required. This work, however, had a different genesis. From the beginning, it was conceived not just as a piece for an orchestra to perform, but also as a work of public art; I wanted to create something for the community of Birmingham. Ultimately, this music is not only for Birmingham; it is for those who visit the city with an interest in its past; it is for anyone interested in the history of Civil Rights; it is for all of us today who have faced fear and oppression. This is not an abstract work, open to any sort of interpretation; this piece is about something. But it is not only about the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church on September 15, 1963. If I had to pin down what that something is, I would say that this piece is dedicated to a question: What do people do when faced with injustice?

Because this is not just a piece of concert music, I wanted to remove some of the usual trappings of the classical tradition. As soon as you enter the lobby, you are made aware that this isn't the usual orchestra piece: there is no clapping for a tuning concertmaster; the conductor is already up on stage; everyone is ready to play; the music had already begun before you and I arrived. You heard a seamless transition between the soundscape playing in the lobby and what you heard as you walked through the doors into the hall. You've been hearing a tapestry of low electronic tones created in conjunction with my collaborator, Philip White, melded with voices from the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI)'s Oral History Project—heroes and ordinary folks. These are the words that make up the libretto of my work. Once the orchestra begins playing, a silent film created by director David Petersen begins. The film, created specifically for *A More Convenient Season*, incorporates both historical footage and images captured by David Petersen during his visits to Birmingham. "Timing", the first movement, begins with members of the orchestra and chorus unable to speak, let alone sing. We hear an almost hyperventilated breathing, preparing for what's to come. When the chorus finally begins, they are still not singing, but whispering words that at the same time are heard in the archival recordings from the BCRI's Oral History Project. This is music reflecting a climate of fear, from which a story of healing and courage will ultimately emerge. The second movement, "Questions", begins without pause. We hear two sets of questions: the first, those asked of bombing suspects by the FBI, in polygraph tests that have an inherent dramatic arc, beginning with rather innocuous tones, ratcheting up in tension and specificity, but—in my work—never arriving at the final question. The second set of questions heard here are the impossible-to-answer ones asked of African-Americans who tried to register to vote. "How high is height? How far is distance?" these citizens were once asked. Out of these questions arises a closing chorus to the movement, which quotes Psalm 133: "Behold, how good and how pleasant for brothers to dwell together in unity." "Negative Peace/Positive Peace", the third movement, begins with a 25-second clip of an archival recording of the Civil Rights song, "We Shall Overcome." This very short clip has been digitally stretched out to 12 minutes, and in doing so each breath and each quaver of the voice is magnified, forming massive waves of sound and power. Words lose their immediate intelligibility through this process, but we gain a new sense of this song's meaning. I transcribed what I heard in this slowed-down version, and you'll hear the orchestra and chorus essentially playing catch-up with the recording; they are attempting to overcome. The intensity, power, and speed required in the task of overcoming is what I am aiming to achieve. At the peak of volume and motion, everything suddenly drops away, and we are left with the chorus, who are by themselves for the first time in almost an hour. They are repeating the phrase: "We are

not afraid.” This very quiet, yet very fast, mantra forms a bridge to the final chorus of the movement: a setting of a fragment from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” Dr. King’s words are hopeful, yet steadfastly realistic, powerful and uplifting, still rooted in an understanding of human fallibility.

I am grateful to so many good and courageous people who made this project possible: Tom Blount for his vision and generosity; Theresa Bruno and the miraculous team at UAB’s Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center for their unflinching support; Jessica Simpson and Katrina Watson for their tireless help and wisdom; Pierre Ruhe and the great Alabama Symphony Orchestra; Laura Anderson from the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, whose knowledge and insight into the oral histories of the people who lived through the Movement formed the cornerstone of my work; Jim Baggett at the Birmingham Public Library for leading me in the right direction; Cynthia Levinson for her incredible interview with Pamela Walbert Montanaro, whose words I set; the electronic composer Philip White for his deeply felt and beautiful musical contributions and collaboration; filmmaker David Petersen for the extraordinary images he brought to this project; Quint and David Harris for their heroic music-making; Michael Morgan for his leadership; and lastly to my wife, Anna, who has stood with me through this unforgettable journey.

A special thanks also to B.J. Love King, Myrna Carter Jackson, Bishop Calvin Woods, and Sol Kimerling for graciously sitting down with me and speaking about your extraordinary lives. I will never forget these conversations. —Yotam Haber, September 2013

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

His music hailed by *New Yorker* critic Alex Ross as “deeply haunting,” and chosen as one of the “30 composers under 40” by Orpheus Chamber Orchestra’s Project 440, **Yotam Haber** was born in Holland and grew up in Israel, Nigeria, and Milwaukee. He is the recipient of a 2013 Fromm Music Foundation commission, the 2007 Rome Prize and a 2005 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship. Recent commissions include works for Pritzker Prize-winning architect Peter Zumthor; new works for New York-based Contemporaneous, Gabriel Kahane, Either/Or, and Alarm Will Sound; the 2012 and 2014 Venice Biennale; 2012 Bang on a Can Summer Festival; the Neuvocalsolisten Stuttgart and ensemble l’arsenale; FLUX Quartet, JACK Quartet, Cantori New York, the Tel Aviv-based Meitar Ensemble, and the Berlin-based Quartet New Generation. He is currently working on *Voice Imitator*, an evening-length cycle of piano works with visual artist and MacArthur Fellow Anna Schuleit; and with librettist Royce Vavrek, a micro-opera commissioned by Cantori NY for 2015. Haber is Artistic Director Emeritus of MATA, the non-profit organization founded by Philip Glass that has, since 1996, been dedicated to commissioning and presenting new works by

young composers from around the world. This year, he serves as Visiting Professor of Composition at the University of New Orleans. His music is published by RAI Trade.

David Petersen has had his films exhibited at numerous international museums and festivals, including Centre Georges Pompidou, The Museum of Modern Art, The Hirshhorn Museum, The National Gallery of Art, and The Library of Congress. His films are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. His Academy Award nominated documentary *Fine Food, Fine Pastries, Open 6 to 9*, received first place prizes in numerous international film festivals and his PBS documentary *If You Lived Here You Would Be Home Now* was an Independent Spirit Award Nominee. His feature-length documentary *Let the Church Say Amen*, premiered at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival and on the PBS series "Independent Lens," and was honored by the Academy Award Documentary Committee as "one of the best documentaries of 2004." His recent films include *Journey of the Bonesetter's Daughter* which premiered on PBS; *2 Months to be Quiet*, commissioned by The MacDowell Colony which premiered at the Museum of Modern Art; *Vila Aliança*, and *Lift*, two feature-length documentaries now in production; and the dramatic film *Billy and Ray*, co-written with New Yorker writer Alex Kotlowitz and produced by Mike Ryan and Amy Hobby (Secretary). David Petersen has received numerous artist fellowships from The MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, The Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Blue Mountain Center, and The Ragdale Foundation. As a writer, he has received commissions from La Jolla Playhouse, Squonk Opera, Miramax Films, Hobby Films; and his fiction has appeared in various literary journals in the United States and overseas. He is now assistant professor at the Department of Media Culture at the CUNY College of Staten Island.

The music of composer, performer and improviser **Philip White** is known for its ecstatic intensity and expressive sonic palette. Working with an array of homemade electronics at the intersection of noise, jazz and contemporary concert music, White exploits the tension between rigorous, closed electronic systems and the urgency of human compulsion. An active collaborator, Philip performs regularly with R WE WHO R WE (with composer Ted Hearne), Colonic Youth (with James Ilgenfritz, Dan Blake and Kevin Shea), thenumber46 (with Suzanne Thorpe), Taylor Levine, Chris Pitsiokos and dancer/choreographer Nora Chipamuire. Philip has been an artist-in-residence at Electronic Music Foundation, Harvestworks, High Concept Labs and the Rensing Center and received grants from New Music USA, the Jerome Foundation. He has lectured at Wesleyan University, University of Chicago, University of South Carolina and the College of Charleston. He received his BA in Music from the College of Charleston and an MFA in Electronic and Recorded Media from Mills College. www.prwhite.net

ABOUT THE COMMISSIONER, TOM BLOUNT

Tom Blount is a native of Montgomery, Alabama, where as a 10-year-old he witnessed the Bus Boycott of 1955, commonly understood to be the start of the active phase of the Civil Rights Movement. At 19 he was out of college for a semester—and back in his hometown—while he switched from studies at Vanderbilt University to the Design School at North Carolina State University. From the sidelines that spring he watched events in nearby Selma, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had organized a weeks-long voting rights campaign. After the “Bloody Sunday” police riot at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, he could no longer stand on the sidelines; he attended the mass rallies when the Selma-to-Montgomery march finally made it to the capital city.

These two events bracketed Tom’s transformation from a boy to a man and had an indelible effect on his worldview. This was intensified by the self-knowledge that not only was he becoming a man, but a gay man. The event commemorated by *A More Convenient Season* happened two years before the Selma march, and it provided a reason so brutal and inexcusable that no reasonable person could remain uncommitted to the natural rights of all mankind.

Tom went on to a career in architecture, which was ended by the arrival of the HIV pandemic in the 1980s. He spent eight years as an advocate for people with AIDS and focused on the provision of effective treatments for a group of people cruelly ignored by their own society. First a member of Act Up, he later founded the Atlanta Buyers Club and worked closely with Project Inform of San Francisco in its advocacy efforts. Merck’s protease inhibitor was one of the first of a class of drugs that transformed what had been a death sentence into a manageable illness. He was deep in the effort to manufacture an underground version of that not-yet-approved drug when his partner of 18 years, Jim Straley, died in August 1995. Merck’s version of the drug was approved several months later.

In 1998 Tom moved from Atlanta to Los Angeles. He soon produced *The Trip* (2002), a film written and directed by Miles Swain, based on stories of Tom’s that Miles had listened to in their four years together. Tom now divides his time between Southern California and southern Italy.

ABOUT THE ALYS STEPHENS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER AT UAB

One of the Southeastern U.S.’s premier performing arts centers, UAB’s Alys Stephens Center works with a vast range of artists to curate and produce original works designed to engage the community in meaningful conversations about topics that reflect and impact the human condition. Through the original works developed to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Movement, including this work, *A More Convenient Season*, the ASC aims to encourage reflection of the past, evaluation of the present, and inspire hope for the future. You can learn more about the programs and initiatives of the ASC by visiting www.AlysStephens.org

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES AT REDCAT

February 4

Chase/Colpitts/Krieger: *Percussion, Justly Tuned*

February 27–March 9

The Wooster Group: *Cry, Trojans!*

March 21

Reinier Van Houdt

March 27–29

Timur and the Dime Museum: *Collapse*

March 22–23

Studio: Winter 2014

April 3–6

Trajal Harrell: *Antigone Sr./Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at the Judson Church (L)*

April 9

Vinny Golia Large Ensemble

April 12–13

Anne LeBaron: *Portrait Concerts*

For more information visit redcat.org

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