



Malmgren Concert Series

presents

Each Moment Radiant: Music of Kurt Erickson and Johannes Brahms

Joel David Balzun, baritone
Kathleen Roland-Silverstein, mezzo-soprano
Katie Weber, mezzo-soprano
Philip Marten, violin
Holgen Gjoni, cello
Scott Cuellar, piano

Sunday, October 20, 2024
4 p.m.

We acknowledge with respect the Onondaga Nation,
Firekeepers of the Haudenosaunee,
the Indigenous people on whose ancestral lands
Syracuse University now stands.

PROGRAM

Welcome: Rev. Brian Konkol, Dean of Hendricks Chapel

Here, Bullet

Kurt Erickson with texts by Brian Turner

- I. Here, Bullet
- II. Eulogy
- III. A Soldier's Arabic
- IV. Curfew

Piano Trio in C minor, Op. 101

Johannes Brahms

- I. Allegro energico
- II. Presto non assai
- III. Andante grazioso
- IV. Allegro molto

WORLD PREMIERE: *Each Moment Radiant*

Kurt Erickson with texts by Brian Turner

- I. Care Falls Like Rain
- II. I Hold a Photograph
- III. The Petals Unfurling (After the Explosion)
- IV. Colin
- V. Sleepers Awake
- VI. Today, the Low Hum of an Afternoon
- VII. Care Falls Like Rain - Reprise

Musicians:

Joel David Balzun, baritone; Katie Weber, mezzo-soprano; Kathleen Roland-Silverstein, mezzo-soprano; Philip Marten, violin; Holgen Gjoni, cello; Scott Cuellar, piano

Texts for *Here, Bullet*

Here, Bullet

If a body is what you want,
then here is bone and gristle and flesh.
Here is the clavicle-snapped wish,
the aorta's opened valves, the leap
thought makes at the synaptic gap.
Here is the adrenaline rush you crave,
that inexorable flight, that insane puncture
into heat and blood. And I dare you to finish
what you've started. Because here, Bullet,
here is where I complete the word you bring
hissing through the air, here is where I moan
the barrel's cold esophagus, triggering
my tongue's explosives for the rifling I have
inside of me, each twist of the round
spun deeper, because here, Bullet,
here is where the world ends, every time.

Eulogy

It happens on a Monday, at 11:20 a.m.,
as tower guards eat sandwiches
and seagulls drift by on the Tigris river.
Prisoners tilt their heads to the west
though burlap sacks and duct tape blind them.
The sound reverberates down concertina coils
the way piano wire thrums when given slack.
And it happens like this, on a blue day of sun,
when Private Miller pulls the trigger
to take brass and fire into his mouth.
The sound lifts the birds up off the water,
a mongoose pauses under the orange trees,
and nothing can stop it now, no matter what
blur of motion surrounds him, no matter what voices
crackle over the radio in static confusion,
because if only for this moment the earth is stilled,
and Private Miller has found what low hush there is
down in the eucalyptus shade, there by the river

A Soldier's Arabic

*"This is a strange new kind of war where you learn
just as much as you are able to believe." — E. Hemingway*

The word for love, Habib, is written from right
to left, starting where we would end it
and ending where we might begin.
Where we would end a war
another might take as a beginning,
or as an echo of history, recited again.
Speak the word for death, Maut,
and you will hear the cursives of the wind
driven into the veil of the unknown.
This is a language made of blood.
It is made of sand, and time.
To be spoken, it must be earned.

Curfew

*The wrong is not in the religion,
The wrong is in us. — Saier T.*

A dusk, bats fly out by the hundreds.
Water snakes glide in the ponding basins
behind the rubble palaces. The mosques
call their faithful in, welcoming
the moonlight as prayer.
Today, policemen sunbathed on traffic islands
and children helped their mothers
string clothes to the line, a slight breeze
filling them with heat.
There were no bombs, no panic in the streets.
Sgt. Gutierrez didn't comfort an injured man
who cupped pieces of his friend's brain
in his hands; instead, today,
white birds rose from the Tigris.

Program notes and texts for *Each Moment Radiant*

Overview

“How do we live with the things we cannot change?”

Each Moment Radiant tells the stories of interweaving lives affected by the tragic bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 in December 1988. The work honors loss while celebrating resilience, love, and our capacity to celebrate the precious and ephemeral moments in our daily lives. Thirty-six years after the December 1988 tragedy, it doesn't make much sense to create a work for the living that starts and ends with an overbearing sense of tragedy. Grief survivors need care and space to contemplate both the tragic and the miraculous.

Early on in the process, poet Brian Turner described an approach as one where we would “create a work built on such profound difficulty, loss, and tragedy while the world, as it always does, turns and turns from one day to the next, *each moment radiant* with the mundane and the miraculous.”

Right then and there, the seeds of the new work were born.

To create a work that truly honors both the living and the dead required research and site visits atypical for the standard commissioning process. Hearing stories firsthand from those most closely affected allows us to translate the nuances of the experience. To personalize the work, we spelled out many of the names of those most closely affected by the tragedy using musical ciphers - I wanted the very DNA of the person's name embedded in the composition as an act of care and tribute.

Care Falls Like Rain

Musically, the bass line in the piano passes through a circle progression of all the keys—symbolizing the passage of time since the calamity, as well as the ‘seasons of grief.’ The structured improvisation is analogous to the unpredictability of life and the vicissitudes of grief. As in all art, the opening section carries us from one world to another, that we might slip into the year 1988 and traverse the passage of time as love and grief braid themselves and evolve over the years.

I Hold a Photograph

This song traces the composer's own experiences as an outsider connecting to the tragedy, by way of curiosity and exploration. A low cello line starts the journey of discovery for the singer and as the details emerge, we view the story in reverse, as beauty and tragedy unspool themselves in turn. The mood intensifies until music and story connect emotionally with an unknown stranger from history.

*I hold a photograph of you in my palms.
And what does it mean for us to meet
across the landscape of time, the vast waves
of memory drawing us closer and closer together.*

*I'm holding a photograph
And learning your name, I'm holding you
in my palms and
I'm seeing it all in reverse, the way the fires
collapse into their own silence,
their smoky plumes breathed back
into the forms of buildings
undone by the wreckage hurtling
from the sky, and all of it
righted once more, the lights
in their windows, the hush*

*of nightfall, the blue cold of Scotland
as passengers return to their stations
in the sky, the plane made shining
and whole once more, engines
thrumming in their housings,
the dials in their instruments
translating the air, the earth, the motion
of bodies in flight, in dream
as it is for those sleeping now
with their heads deep in a world
made of sunlight and moonlight
and futures only they can imagine.
The way a thought might vanish into itself,
That long exhale of smoke*

The Petals Unfurling (After the Explosion)

This work is based on an impossible-to-believe, real life story: a Scottish ambulance driver finds the body of a fallen girl from Syracuse outside his place of work, and later plants a rose bush in her honor. The man and his wife befriend the girl's parents and years later—when both of their respective spouse's pass away—the ambulance driver and the mother of the girl fall in love and get married.

The first half of the song is built upon a relatively simple and repeated harmonic progression, reflecting the exuberance of the young girl. The second part pivots abruptly and is slower, more complex, reflecting the passage of time and the complicated nature of love after loss. The opening theme returns, but in a slow and stately manner—reflecting the intertwined nature of grief and love.

*After the explosion, after the ambulance driver
opened the door to step into a changed world,
he discovered the body of a fallen girl, from Syracuse,
a young woman he lifted in his arms from that hallowed ground,
where roses now climb on green stems to petal open
in color, soft and fragrant as her hair curling
in long, shining strands, unspooling from his arms
forever now, the way roses unfurl after bloom,
their petals raining down year after year after year
after year after year—
and after years and decades
spent mourning, after life brought the loss of a husband
and then a wife, the widows who shared
in the tragedy—
impossible, impossible but true—
impossible they too fell in love—
the man who lifted
a daughter in his arms to carry her home, and the woman
who echoed roses in her hair—
petal by petal unfurling*

Colin

This spoken word ‘song’ with piano accompaniment is a poetic first-person account of the tragedy from the perspective of retired Policeman and Lockerbie resident Colin Dorrance, a Virgil-like figure who has made it his life’s mission to help grieving families and friends of the victims come to terms with this senseless tragedy. Colin describes the night of the crash site in terms of the chaos, destruction, and confusion that rained down from the sky onto the muddy fields of December 21, the shortest night of the year, when the sun had set some four hours before the plane broke apart overhead at 31,000 feet.

The choice for spoken recitation reflects a desire for directness of expression, unadorned by the transformation into melody and musical nuance. As the piece comes to a close, the remaining performers enter and recite the names of the Syracuse students lost in the tragedy, honoring their memory by saying their names publicly as the music fades into the ether.

*He was under the bomb and didn’t even know it,
though he saw the wings over Lockerbie
and then Lockerbie on fire, that loop
of grey film the mind plays over and over,
decade by decade, so that even his own children
know the narrative by heart, how the plane
burst into fire and rain as the earth embraced
all manner of beauty the human body
might hold, as it always has and always will,
responding over the green hills of Scotland
with a bouquet of flowers in spring—where he’s left
to wonder—*

*How do we live with the things we cannot change?
How do we live with the things we cannot change?*

*After the murder, he says,
after we carried and lifted
their bodies in our arms, from the wild terrain of night
and into a cathedral of silence,
after the cameras
long since turned away, and the world moved on
as it always has and always will,
after the falling
and the floating, sunlight and storm, after
the singing and the looping of houses on fire, after
midnight and daylight shining blue days of wonder,
after my own children taught me how to carry
the dead within me, the past with its living presence
breathing cloud and wind and rain and the bluest
sky you could ever imagine, one loss
after another, after all of this—*

*we emerge from the auditorium, from the makeshift
hospital, the bells ringing in our ears for years
and decades on, the questions repeating*

*How do we live with the things we cannot change?
How do we live with the things we cannot change?*

*And I begin to realize, he says, that
this isn't about the spiraling descent into trauma,
this is about the word love, what we make of it
in the quiet years after, the word love
when we feel the distant engines thrumming
in our chests, the cold night air
we take into our lungs so that we might discover
the words for what happened here,
for all that is happening still.*

*Name by name we call out to the dead still living
within us, within the doomed cathedral of memory.*

Sleepers Awake

If an act of global terrorism on an unsuspecting populace is among the worst things possible, perhaps Bach's music can be seen as among the best civilization has to offer. While the "Colin" setting recounts the devastation from the night of the tragedy, "Sleepers Awake" provides a hope for redemption and emotional solace. Bach's music is comforting, and comfort is what we need after tragedy (Bach's music is also representative of our shared human experience more generally as it is heard at major life events such as weddings, baptisms, death, entertainment, etc.).

Today, the Low Hum of an Afternoon

On an idyllic day in Lockerbie, this spoken piece explores a space and moment composed in serenity, a moment of sunlight and calm, where the meditation has come to rest within the present day.

*Today, the low hum of an afternoon,
soft engines of traffic, birdsong,
sunlight sculpting the expressions
of loved ones in the drifting clouds.*

*A flock of sheep graze the bladed grass
along the drystane fences of Dumfries
and Galloway, as the salt and tang of the ocean
arrives from the cold waters of the Solway Firth.*

*It is a slow blue day in history, with the past
brushing through a dreamer's hair
fast asleep in the old chair in the front room.
It is a sweet, rare thing, invisible and fleeting,*

*here a moment only, then gone, the way it is
for those we love, the way it is for us all.*

Care Falls like Rain - Reprise

The final movement ends where it began, with a reprise of "Care Falls Like Rain" but this time with the voices inserted into the musical space, ghosts bathing us in the glow of memory. Those starry flights of dreamers who live on not just in the sky over Lockerbie, but in our hearts.

—the way it is, this timeless now

—a chorus of dreamers in mem'ry

—the bright faces of our loved ones

—so radiant and breathless

—singing Love you, I love you

—whose names we ghost the air with fire

—in the presence of the sacred

—carried by mem'ry

—carried by the wind

—carried breathless by wonder

—given silence, given midnight

—given a sculpture of shadows

—given an eternity of engines

—and the low hum of traffic

—given birdsong and sunlight

—these lives we hear singing

—these lives we hear singing

—one silence to another, singing

—their mouths dreaming open

—a starry flight of dreamers

—how they glide on the waters of the sky

—this starry flight of dreamers

—summer by winter by fall by spring

—in the air over Lockerbie

—a starry flight of dreamers

—singing breathless I love you

—summer by winter by fall by spring

—singing timeless our loved ones

—this starry flight of dreamers

—singing in the presence of the sacred

—summer by winter by fall by spring

—singing one world to another

—this starry flight of dreamers

—blue nightfall, blue dreamers

—singing breathless I love you

—this starry flight of dreamers

—this starry flight of dreamers

—this starry flight of dreamers

—this starry flight of dreamers

Kurt Erickson, composer

Composer Kurt Erickson specializes in writing works for multi-disciplinary collaborative projects. His song set *Here, Bullet* has been performed across the globe and occupies a unique place in the classical music world as a composition being turned into a short film, as a vehicle for veterans arts therapy programs, and the recipient of the First Prize Award in the 2020 NATS Art Song Composition Competition. Erickson currently serves as Composer-in-Residence with San Francisco's LIEDER ALIVE! He has designed and implemented over fifteen years of multi-year composer residencies with a wide assortment of performing arts organizations, dance companies, and cathedrals and national shrines. Erickson has been called "a composer at the height of his powers" and his music has been described as "haunting and poetic", "gripping", "genuinely moving"; with one author writing that a performance "moved this reviewer to tears". His work *Seventeen Minutes and Twenty-Two Seconds* was written for a consortium of twenty pianists and opened the fifth season of the San Francisco International Piano Festival. Recent performances of his music have been heard at Deutsche Oper Berlin, at colleges across the country, and on classical music radio programs and podcasts. He is a frequent performer and collaborator with his wife, acclaimed soprano and scientist Heidi Moss Erickson.

Brian Turner, poet

Brian Turner has five collections of poetry, from *Here, Bullet* to *The Dead Peasant's Handbook* (all with Alice James Books), and a memoir—*My Life as a Foreign Country* (with W.W. Norton & Co.). He's the editor of *The Kiss* and co-edited *The Strangest of Theatres*. He lives in Florida with his dog, Dene, the world's sweetest golden retriever.

Joel David Balzun, baritone

Praised for his "voluminous sound" and "imposing, ringing baritone," Canadian baritone and composer Joel Balzun is establishing himself as an intelligent and creative musical force both on and off the stage. He was recently an award-winner in the Wagner Society of New York Singers Competition, following his win of the Fulham Opera Robert Presley Memorial Verdi Prize, solidifying his growing presence in the dramatic repertoire. Upcoming engagements include a world premiere by Kurt Erickson, Don Marco Bomba (*Don Bucefalo*) with Pacific Opera Project and an important debut as the bass soloist in Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* with San Luis Obispo Master Chorale. Recent performance highlights include exciting debuts at Los Angeles Opera (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) and Opera Las Vegas (Schaunard - *La bohème*). His recent role and house debut as Escamillo in Union Avenue Opera's *Carmen* was heralded as "swaggering, supremely self-confident" and sung with a "thunderous" and "booming" voice. Other recent performance highlights include Marcello (*La bohème*) with Pacific Opera Project, Giorgio Germont (*La traviata*) with Opera Santa Barbara, works of Mozart and Ralph Vaughan Williams with San Luis Obispo Master Chorale and numerous recitals featuring the premiere performances of *Black Dog* by Tom Cipullo throughout the USA, including at the Ravinia Music Festival and Cincinnati Song Initiative.

Also an accomplished composer, Mr. Balzun's "haunting and beautiful" music has received international recognition, garnering prizes from the SOCAN Foundation Awards for Young Composers, the Dallas Winds' annual "Call for Fanfares" and the Classical Marimba League International Composition Competition. He was also a finalist for the prestigious ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers Awards. In 2010, Mr. Balzun was also a prize-winner in the National Broadcast Orchestra's Galaxie Rising Star Composers' Competition, winning both the Young Composers Prize and the Grand Prize. He has appeared as a guest presenter and composer at the CBDNA National Conference and CFAMC National Conference, where he was also a featured soloist.

Kathleen Roland-Silverstein, mezzo-soprano

Kathleen Roland-Silverstein is a highly regarded scholar and concert soloist, well known for her performance of contemporary art music, and for her contribution to scholarly research on Scandinavian song. She has been a featured singer with many music festivals, including the Tanglewood and Santa Fe Chamber Music Festivals, and has sung in Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Cambodia, Vietnam and throughout the United States. The soprano has appeared with orchestras and ensembles world-wide, in venues ranging from the Hollywood Bowl, Disney Hall, and the San Francisco Opera, to the American Scandinavian House in NYC and the Hanoi Opera House in Vietnam. Dr. Roland was a senior Fulbright scholar to Sweden in 2009, and is the author of *Romanser: 25 Swedish Songs with Guide to Lyric*.

Her current project is a performance guide to the songs of Jean Sibelius, to be published by Oxford University Press in late 2024. Dr. Roland serves on two peer-reviewed journals in the field of voice and opera, as associate editor for the *Journal of Singing*, the official journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, and as assistant editor of the *Opera Journal*, for the National Opera Association. She is a member of the faculty at the Setnor School of Music, Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York, where she teaches voice, vocal literature, and voice pedagogy.

Katie Weber, mezzo-soprano

Mezzo Soprano Katie Weber is a dynamic and moving performer, with a commitment to text, musicality, and communication through music. "Weber possesses a formidable instrument, with a highly melodious but penetrating timbre." Member of Actors Equity Association since 2017, her non-linear career started in New York City and has spanned musical showcases, cabaret work, performing in workshops of new musicals and operas, recording new works, and singing for recording studio sessions. She made her Off-Broadway Debut in *Sweetee: A New Musical* directed by Emmy Award Winner Pat Birch at Signature Theater in NYC. In addition to pursuing her budding singing career, she is currently teaching at Onondaga Community College as an adjunct professor of voice and choir. Born and raised in Syracuse NY, Katie received a double bachelors from the Eastman School of Music in Voice Performance and Music Education, and in May 2024 received her Masters of Music in Voice Pedagogy from Syracuse University Setnor School of Music. Website: www.kaywebernyc.com

Philip Marten, violin

Currently 1st Assistant Concertmaster of the Cincinnati Symphony, Philip Marten joined the Kansas City Symphony in 2016 as a first violin section member and served as Acting Assistant Concertmaster in 2017. Since arriving in Cincinnati, he has been active in the community with organizations such as Concert:Nova, The Response Project, and Ascent Festival, and in the 24/25 season, he will be personally curating and performing a new series of concerts with the Red Door Series. During his time with the CSO, he has appeared several times as a soloist with the orchestra. He has also appeared as guest concertmaster with the Kansas City Symphony and the Kentucky Symphony Orchestra.

Holgen Gjoni, cello

Hailed for his "seriousness and depth of an authentic concert soloist", Holgen Gjoni has been steadily gaining a reputation as one of the most sought-after cellists of his generation and has performed as soloist and recitalist throughout the United States, Europe and Asia. Winner of the 1st Prize at the "John Hsu" and "Nancy Tumarlin" New England Conservatory Cello Concerto Competitions, 2nd Prize at The Juilliard Concerto Competition, 1st Prize at Bucharest Music University Concerto Competition, 2nd Prize at the "Mihail Jora" International Cello Competition, Special Prize at Jeunesse Musicales International Cello Competition, Karl Zeise Memorial Cello Award for Outstanding Commitment of Talent from the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Presidential Award from The Boston Conservatory, Jerome L. Greene Fellowship Award from the Juilliard School and the Gregor Piatigorsky Fellowship at the New England Conservatory, he has been praised internationally by critics for his "technique, beauty of sound and emotional projection," "tempestuous musical sensibility, marked by an ineffable luminosity of expression," "an elite musician," while the legendary Yo-Yo Ma writes of him as "a cellist of great talent."

Highlights of his versatile career include performances at Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher, Alice Tully and Merkin Halls, Kennedy Center, Strathmore, Jordan, Seiji Ozawa and Tchaikovsky Concert Halls, Berlin and Budapest Opera Houses, Vatican, Tokyo City Opera, Shanghai Center Theatre and Beijing Century Theatre. Since his solo debut with Korca String Orchestra (Albania) at the age of twelve, Mr. Gjoni went on to play as soloist with numerous orchestras, including the Radio Chamber Orchestra (Romania), Radio and Television Orchestra (Albania), Greeley Philharmonic in Colorado

(USA) and Symphony by the Sea Orchestra in Massachusetts (USA), while touring extensively around the world as the featured soloist of the Symphonia Orchestra (Italy) and the Philharmonie of the Nations, in solo performances as an Ambassador of Peace before a Papal audience at the Vatican. An avid chamber musician, Mr. Gjoni's collaboration with the Borromeo String Quartet (Avery Fisher Grant winner) was praised by *The Boston Musical Intelligencer*: "The round, full bodied tones of guest cellist Holgen Gjoni were especially notable."

Scott Cuellar, piano

Scott Cuellar has given solo recitals at major venues around the world, including Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, Vienna's Konzerthaus, the Newport Music Festival, the Polytheatre Chongqing and the Shenyang Conservatory of Music in the People's Republic of China, the Gijón International Piano Festival in Asturias, Spain, and the Conservatorio Nacional de Música in Lima, Peru. He has presented masterclasses at Renmin University in Beijing, the Piano Academy of Bangkok, Sejong and Hansei universities in Seoul, the Oberlin Piano Institute, and has lectured at the Juilliard School. He has appeared as a soloist with the San Antonio Symphony, the Louisiana Philharmonic, the Mississippi Symphony, the Rochester Symphony Orchestra, and several others. He studied at Rice University, The Juilliard School, the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. He teaches at Syracuse University's Setnor School of Music; prior to his engagement at Syracuse, he taught at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

This concert is made possible with generous support from the Malmgren Fund at Hendricks Chapel, the Sentor School of Music in the College of Visual and Performing Arts, Syracuse Symposium, the D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Office of Veteran and Military Affairs, Society for New Music, and the Office of Remembrance.

The Malmgren Concert Series of Hendricks Chapel

Join us for music to stir the soul and ignite the spirit as we welcome renowned musicians to the stage of Hendricks Chapel in the heart of Syracuse University!

Sunday, November 17, 4 PM - "A World of Song" Choral Concert feat. University Singers and Concert Choir

Sunday, February 23, 4 PM - Black History Month Celebration Concert

Sunday, March 2, 4 PM - Bach and Buxtehude with NYS Baroque

Sunday, April 6, 4 PM - Solo Organ Concert by Nathaniel Gumbs

Sunday, April 13, 4 PM - Rudersdal Chamber Players

Sunday, April 27, 4 PM - Spring Choral Concert feat. University Singers and Hendricks Chapel Choir

Please join us for these additional concerts with the Hendricks Chapel Choir:

Sunday, November 3 at 4 PM - High School Choral Festival

Sunday, December 8 at 4:30 PM and 7:30 PM - Holidays at Hendricks

Sunday, February 2 at 4 PM - Community Hymn and Anthem Sing

Sunday, May 4 at 4 PM - Blessing of Students

For more information, visit chapel.syracuse.edu.