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CONCERT SERIES



THE
WHISPER OPERA

WORDS + MUSIC BY DAVID LANG

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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Ours is an age where one finds it increasingly difficult to hear, precisely because of the ubiquitous and constant cacophony of sounds in our daily urban lives. R. Murray Schafer has long believed that contemporary urban life has resulted in an almost total human disconnect with nature, and that we have lost the ability to hear music and sound in the context of silence. Many of his projects are realized late at night or in the wilderness, thereby creating conditions under which we have no choice but to learn to listen anew.

Composers have done it in other ways too. The opening of Henryk Górecki's monumental mass choir work *Miserere*, presented by Soundstreams in 2012, is so quiet for the first ten minutes that it takes the audience several minutes to become silent. Similarly, David Lang's *The Whisper Opera* creates an auditory experience at the very threshold of silence where we have no choice but to listen carefully!

It is said that all musical instruments aspire to the human voice. What else has that spectrum of expression, dynamics, timbre and sheer power to engage us at the deepest emotional level, hence the enormous appeal of opera?

David Lang plays with our sense of what opera is, deliberately turning the conventions of classic operas on their head, where larger-than-life themes are typically projected in larger-than-life opera houses. There is something immediately mysterious and intimate about whispering and murmuring that makes us hushed and attentive in ways that we would never otherwise be. Somewhere deep down, composers through the ages have probably hoped that their new works might influence the ways in which we listen to music. In this endeavor alone, Mr. Lang has succeeded admirably.

Lawrence Cherney
Artistic Director

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ABOUT SOUNDSTREAMS

Soundstreams An International Centre for New Directions in Music

Led by Artistic Director Lawrence Cherney and Executive Director Susan Worthington, Soundstreams is a Toronto-based music presenter that commissions, develops, and showcases the work of contemporary Canadian composers and their international counterparts.

These innovative collaborations are performed by the finest artists from Canada and around the world, and are presented in an annual concert series, our Salon 21 series at The Gardiner Museum, in national and international tours, and through a variety of education and outreach activities. To mark our 30th anniversary season in 2012/13, Soundstreams launched SoundMakers, an innovative website and iPad app that invites music lovers to explore Soundstreams' commissioned works, create new works of their own, and share them with the online community.

Over the past three decades, Soundstreams commissions have added more than 150 works to the musical repertoire worldwide, reflecting a diverse variety of genres and cultural traditions. Soundstreams has also presented a number of festivals and conferences such as the Northern Encounters Festival, University Voices, Toronto Fanfare Project, and the Cool Drumming percussion festival and conference, as well award-winning operas including Thomson Highway and Melissa Hui's Cree opera *Pimootewin: The Journey* and R. Murray Schafer's site-specific opera *The Children's Crusade*, and Brian Current's *Airline Icarus*.



THE WHISPER OPERA

David Lang, words & music
Jim Findlay, director & designer
Tony Arnold, soprano
International Contemporary Ensemble



February 26, 8:00 pm
February 27, 7:00 pm & 10:00 pm

February 28, 2:00 pm & 7:00 pm
March 1, 2:00 pm

The Theatre Centre, 1115 Queen Street West

PROGRAM

THE WHISPER OPERA

1. "when I am alone I always"
2. "they said I was crazy but I"
3. "when I think of you I think of"
4. "it's not my fault that I am so"

INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ENSEMBLE (ICE)

Claire Chase, flutes
Joshua Rubin, clarinets
Kivie Cahn-Lipman, cello
Ross Karre, percussion

CREATIVE

Costume Design	Karen Young
Stage Manager	Kim Guzowski
Soundstreams Production Manager	Patrick Lavender
Theatre Centre Director of Facilities & Production	Justis Danto-Clancy
Theatre Centre Box Office & Front of House Manager	Julia Nish-Lapidus
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FUNDING CREDITS

David Lang's *The Whisper Opera* is made possible, in part, by a Commissioning Music/USA grant from New Music USA.

RUNNING TIME

70 minutes, no intermission

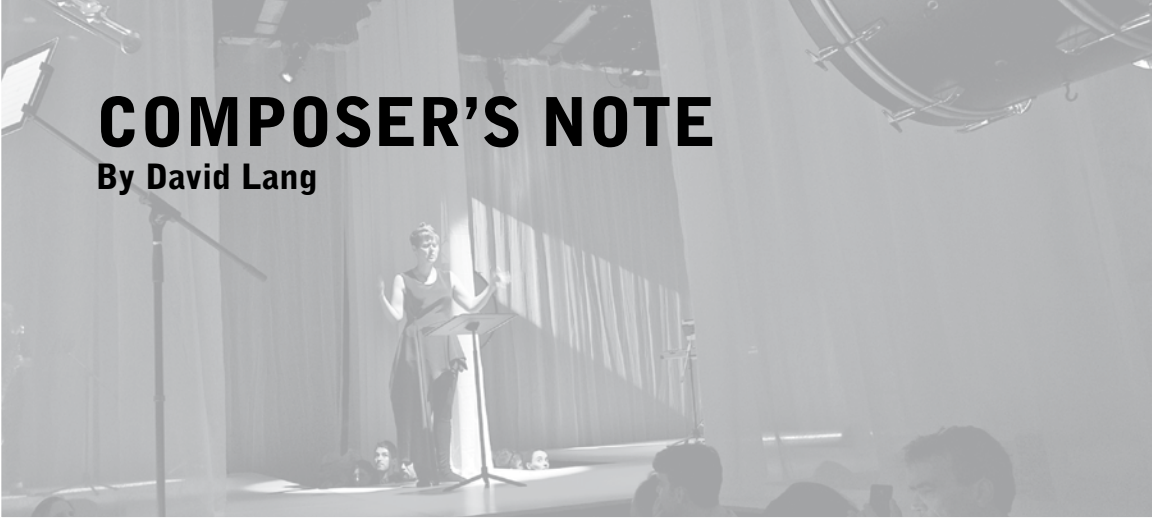
Proud to support The Whisper Opera.

We are working together with Soundstreams to make a difference in our communities.



COMPOSER'S NOTE

By David Lang



Almost all the music you could ever want is on the internet right now, recorded perfectly and played perfectly, and accessible immediately, 24 hours a day. On the one hand this is fantastic—I can hear huge amounts of music, from different genres and time periods, and traditions and cultures, any time I want. On the other hand, I love hearing music live. If most music is now available and recorded perfectly and ever present, is it possible that the meaning of hearing music live will change? For the past few years I have been designing pieces that try to highlight things that can only happen live.

I have written pieces that are so hard, that watching the musicians struggle to perform them becomes a central part of the experience; I have written concert pieces that have elaborate theatrical instructions; I have written pieces whose power comes from the emotionality of hearing them from inside a community of listeners. With *The Whisper Opera*, I had another of these ideas—what if a piece were so quiet, and so intimate, and so personal to the performers,

“WHAT IF A PIECE WERE SO QUIET AND INTIMATE, THAT YOU NEEDED TO BE RIGHT NEXT TO THE PERFORMERS OR YOU WOULD HEAR ALMOST NOTHING?”

that you needed to be right next them or you would hear almost nothing? A piece like this would have to be experienced live. In honor of this, the score to *The Whisper Opera* states clearly that it can never be recorded, or filmed, or amplified. The only way this piece can be received is if you are there, listening very, very closely.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION ONLINE



CREATIVE TEAM BIOGRAPHIES



David Lang
Composer

David Lang is one of the most highly-esteemed American composers writing today. His works have been performed around the world and in many of the great concert halls. The recipient of a wide array of awards, Lang won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize in music for *the little match girl passion*, based on a fable by Hans Christian Andersen and Lang's own rewriting of the libretto to Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion*. The recording of the piece on Harmonia Mundi was awarded a 2010 Grammy Award for Best Small Ensemble Performance.

Lang's tenure as 2013-14 Composer in Residence at Carnegie Hall saw his *mystery sonatas* with Augustin Hadelich premiered. His festival, *collected stories*, showcased different modes of storytelling in music. Lang's compositional range will be on display when

he serves as the 2014-15 Composer-in-Residence at de Doelen in Rotterdam, and many of his pieces will be receiving their European premieres.

Lang's music is used regularly in ballet and dance productions around the world by such choreographers as Twyla Tharp, Susan Marshall, Edouard Lock, and Benjamin Millepied. Lang's film work includes the score for Jonathan Parker's (*Untitled*), the music for the award-winning documentary *The Woodmans*, and the string arrangement for *Requiem for a Dream*, performed by Kronos Quartet. His music is also on the soundtrack for Paolo Sorrentino's Oscar-winning *La Grande Bellezza*. In addition to his work as a composer, Lang co-founded Bang on a Can, a prominent new music festival in New York. He is Professor of Composition at the Yale School of Music.



Jim Findlay
Director & Designer

Jim Findlay works across boundaries as a director, designer, visual artist and performer. He was a founding member of the Collapsible Giraffe and Accinosco/Cynthia Hopkins, and is a frequent collaborator with Bang on a Can, Ralph Lemon, and Ridge Theater. Recent productions include *Botanica* (writer and director), David Lang's *Love Fail* (set and video design), Annie Dorsen's *A Piece of Work* (set and video design), and David T. Little/Royce Vavrek's *Dog Days* (set and video design).

His work has been seen at Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, BAM, Arena Stage, A.R.T. and over 50 cities worldwide, as well as at the tiny theater that he designed and built in David Lang's home. He has received two Obie awards, two Bessie awards, a Lucille Lortel award, and a Henry Hewes award.

GUEST ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



Tony Arnold
Soprano



International Contemporary
Ensemble (ICE)

Hailed by *The New York Times* as “a bold and powerful interpreter,” Tony has gained international acclaim for sparkling and insightful performances of the most daunting contemporary scores. She has received critical acclaim for her performances with the International Contemporary Ensemble, Chicago Symphony Orchestra MusicNOW, L.A. Philharmonic New Music Group, New York New Music Ensemble, eighth blackbird, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and many others. Tony has collaborated with the most renowned composers of our day, including George Crumb, György Kurtág, Georges Aperghis, David Lang, Ricardo Zohn Muldoon, Jason Eckardt, and many others. Since 2003 Ms. Arnold has served on the faculty of the University at Buffalo. In 2009 she was the Howard Hanson Visiting Professor of American Music at the Eastman School.

The International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), described by *The New York Times* as “one of the most accomplished and adventurous groups in new music,” is dedicated to reshaping the way music is created and experienced. With a modular makeup of 35 leading instrumentalists, performing in forces ranging from solos to large ensembles, ICE functions as performer, presenter, and educator, advancing the music of our time by developing innovative new works and new strategies for audience engagement. ICE redefines concert music as it brings together new work and new listeners in the 21st century.

Since its founding in 2001, ICE has premiered over 500 compositions—the majority of these new works by emerging composers—in venues spanning from alternative spaces to concert halls around the world.

The ensemble has received the American Music Center’s Trailblazer Award for its contributions to the field, the ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming, and was named Musical America Worldwide’s Ensemble of the Year in 2013. From 2008 to 2013, ICE was Ensemble-in-Residence at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. In 2014 ICE began a partnership with the Illinois Humanities Council, the Hideout in Chicago, and the Abrons Art Center in New York to support the OpenICE initiative.



ARTIST Q&A TONY ARNOLD

We caught up with Tony over email, in between performances of *The Whisper Opera*, to discuss how she became a singer, what inspired her distinctive nickname, and how she prepares for performances.

Soundstreams: What inspired you to become a singer?

Tony Arnold: Singing came really late in the game for me, and there were a lot of formative experiences that inspired me to become a musician first. I was hungry to play any instrument I could get my hands on when I was very young. I remember being so intrigued by a documentary about Charles Ives when I was 12 years old [and thinking], could you really write music in two keys simultaneously? Wow, that was a big idea to me.

SS: You’re known as “Screecher.” What influenced that descriptive nickname?

TA: It began as a kind of joke. I was beginning my career singing contemporary music, and well aware of the common knock about this music sounding “screechy.” So I thought, let’s play on that: thus, a screecher was born.... or at least screecher.com [Tony’s website] was born.

SS: You’ve performed *The Whisper Opera* all over the world. How did you get involved with this piece?

TA: As a member of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), I am fortunate to have many things come my way because of the great network of collaborators that ICE attracts and inspires. David Lang and ICE had been in conversations about a range of projects, and *The Whisper Opera* was one of them.

SS: *The Whisper Opera* is an intense and physical piece, which requires long periods of whispering that can strain your voice if not done properly. How did you prepare for this role and what techniques do you use in your performance?

TA: I am looking to stay as relaxed as possible, and to use only the minimum amount of muscular effort required to whisper. This requires conscious releasing of the muscles in my neck, throat, and my tongue while whispering. I try to maximize the friction of consonants over the vowels — the more energy I put into a “ssss” or a “shhhh,” the less pressure I feel when I have to whisper on an open “aaahh,” which can be tiring. Finding the colors of the words and then connecting them to the bottom of my breath (in my belly) helps a great deal too.

SS: Lang’s basis for *The Whisper Opera* was to explore the tensions between our online and private selves. How does this theme resonate with you as an artist?

TA: There is always a tension between outside and inside, between public and private. As a performer, often times we are asked to be the voice of private thoughts that may or may not be similar to our own. Performers are both focal points and conduits of universal emotions that audiences project onto in very personal ways. That’s part of the contract between artist and audience. *The Whisper Opera* offers up an experience of a wide range of emotions that are not connected in any kind of specific narrative.

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