



The
Edge of
silence

vocal chamber music of György Kurtág
featuring
Susan Narucki, soprano
Curtis Macomber, violin
Nicholas Tolle, cimbalom
Kathryn Schulmeister, double bass

WEDS@7
February 21st, 2018 | 7:00 p.m.
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall



Wednesdays@7 Presents

The Edge of Silence

Vocal Chamber Music of György Kurtág

Wednesday, February 21st, 2018 – 7:00 pm
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Erinnerung an einen Winterabend, Op. 8 (1969)
voice, violin and cimbalom

Hét Dal, Op. 22 (1982)
voice and cimbalom

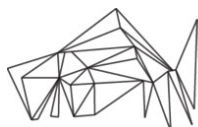
Attila József Fragments, Op. 20 (1984)
soprano solo

Intermission

S.K. Remembrance Noise, Op. 12 (1977)
voice and violin

Scenes from a Novel, Op. 19 (1982)
voice, violin, cimbalom, bass

Susan Narucki, soprano
Curtis Macomber, violin
Nicholas Tolle, cimbalom
Kathryn Schulmeister, bass



Program Note

György Kurtág is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant composers of the modern era. Born in 1926 in Lugos, Hungary, Kurtág studied piano and composition at an early age; in addition to his studies with noted Hungarian composers Veress and Farkas, he studied in Paris with Marianne Stein and in courses offered by Messiaen and Milhaud. In some respects, his music can be viewed as a remarkable space in which many discrete trajectories of music intertwine and are transformed, resulting in music that is both distinctly individual and wholly of our time.

As you will hear in this evening's program, Kurtág's musical language is infused with the folk music of his native Hungary. At times, it hangs on simple, spare melodic lines, and rhythmic structures of folk dances. Three of the works on the program incorporate virtuoso writing for the cimbalom, an elaborate dulcimer played by two wooden hammers, which is used extensively in the folk music of the region.

However, in its use of pitch material and structure, the music also seems to refer to the Second Viennese School, particularly the late works of Anton Webern. The vocal and instrumental writing is highly chromatic, using extremes of musical expression and with a fragmented structure, in which silences and interruptions are an essential component of the whole. These ideas, so disparate and so strong, find a meeting-place in Kurtág's music, resulting in a singular compositional language.

Kurtág's music for voice fuses complex emotional expression with a highly nuanced response to the rhythmic inflections of each language that he sets. The idiosyncratic notation that he has developed and which he utilizes in his mature works utilizes unusual symbols that represent an extremely fine gradation of duration and phrasing. Every piece of information on the page is necessary. To the uninitiated, it can seem overly complicated and quite daunting. Yet the final result is music that is intuitive - fluid, asymmetrical, powerful - alive.

Tonight's concert is an exploration of Kurtág's music for the soprano voice. Many of the works were premiered by the soprano Adrienne Csengery, an artist with whom he had a close association for a number of years. I had the great good fortune to work with both of them on a number of occasions, in my pursuit of this elusive, beautiful music. I still benefit from their generosity, many years later.

The program begins with the rarely heard *Erinnerung an einen Winterabend, Op. 8*, for voice, cimbalom and violin. The four poems are fragments from Hungarian poet Pál Gulyás. They reflect the poet's response to the essential crisis of the 20th century, brought about through the brutality of war, with an underlying belief that human society needed to find a new simplicity, one in balance with the natural world. The four songs foreshadow Kurtág's later work. Within the work, musical asymmetries are expressed within metrics of conventional notation, including bar lines. The cimbalom is incorporated in a manner that underscores its traditional use and references the musical idioms of the instrument.

By contrast, in *Hét Dal, Op. 22*, Kurtág's writing for the cimbalom has been integrated into his mature compositional voice. In these six short poems by Amy Károlyi and Ars poetica of Issa Kobayashi, Kurtág fuses the rhythms of Hungarian language to a vocal line that utilizes extremes in range and which vividly illuminates the text. At times the voice and cimbalom are in rhythmic unison, at times, the cimbalom creates a gauze of atmosphere in which the voice loses itself.

The *Attila József Fragments, Op. 20*, for unaccompanied soprano are set to fragments of poems from one of Hungary's most beloved poets of the twentieth century. The songs range in duration from ten seconds to several minutes, and present an astonishing range of emotions through the vehicle of a single voice. One of the many things that Kurtág told me about the pieces was that the fragments should be presented as if you are switching between two channels of a radio station. But what you need to remember, he said, is that both of the channels are always playing.

On the second half of the program, we present *S.K. Remembrance Noise, Op. 12*, an early work for soprano and violin to short poems of Dezső Tandori. The seven short songs are more objective in tone and at times, darkly humorous. Elements of the virtuoso writing for violin foreshadow Kurtág's *Kafka Fragments*, his seventy-five minute song cycle for voice and violin.

The final piece is *Scenes from a Novel, Op. 19*, a twenty-minute cycle to poems by Russian poet Rimma Dalos. The work was completed several years after *Messages of the Late R.V. Troussova*, for soprano and chamber orchestra, with text by the same poet. *Troussova* was the work that first brought Kurtág's music to wider international attention. *Scenes from a Novel* features a pared down instrumentation; it is shorter in duration. On the surface, the two works have a similar narrative: an unhappy love affair. However, *Scenes from a Novel* is in some ways, much grittier. The lovers' ecstasy is short-lived, the poems emphasize the

protagonist's uncertainty and frustration as the connection seems to become more tenuous, always just out of reach. The implicit message of *Troussova* is that the protagonist ends her life; in *Scenes from a Novel*, the protagonist endures - that message, though much less dramatic, is sharper and closer to the bone.

I would like to thank my fellow musicians on this evening's program - Curtis Macomber, Nicholas Tolle and Kathryn Schulmeister - for their dedication and excellence. I am glad we took this journey together.

–Susan Narucki

Special thanks to:

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With luminous tone and distinctive artistry, American soprano **SUSAN NARUCKI** has earned critical acclaim for three decades. She has appeared with as a soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Netherlands Opera, San Francisco Symphony, MET Chamber Ensemble, on the Great Performers Series at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall with conductors such as Boulez, Levine, Salonen, Tilson Thomas, de Leeuw and Knussen. A dedicated advocate of the music of our time, Ms. Narucki has given over one hundred world premieres, and has enjoyed close collaborations with composers including Andriessen, Kurtág, Carter, Dusapin and Crumb. Her extensive discography includes both a Grammy Award and Grammy Nomination for Best Classical Vocal Performance.

Ms. Narucki's commissioned projects illuminate broader issues in society and has earned major grants from the Creative Capital Foundation, the MAP Fund for the Performing Arts, UC MEXUS and multiple awards from the National Endowment for the Arts. She commissioned and performed in the critically acclaimed *Cuatro Corridos* (2013), a chamber opera that addresses human trafficking across the U.S.-Mexican border. With libretto by internationally acclaimed novelist Jorge Volpi, *Cuatro Corridos* has had over a dozen performances in the United States and Mexico, including performances at CENART, Mexico City. The opera has been broadcast multiple times on CANAL 22, Mexico's art and culture broadcasting network and was nominated for a 2017 Latin Grammy.

Ms. Narucki is currently producing *Inheritance*, a chamber opera which addresses issues surrounding gun violence in America. With music by UCSD composer Lei Liang and libretto by poet Matt Donovan, *Inheritance* is scheduled to premiere at UC San Diego in October, 2018. Ms. Narucki is a Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego, where she directs the ensemble *kallisti*.

The playing of violinist **CURTIS MACOMBER** was praised recently by the New York Times for its "thrilling virtuosity" and by Strad Magazine for its "panache". He enjoys a varied and distinguished career as soloist, chamber musician, and teacher, and he has for several decades been recognized as one of this country's foremost interpreters and proponents of new music. Mr. Macomber's extensive discography includes the complete Brahms and Grieg Sonatas as well as hundreds of critically praised recordings of contemporary solo and chamber works. As a member of the New World String Quartet from 1982-93, he performed in virtually all the important concert series in this country, as well as touring abroad. He is the violinist of Da Capo, a founding member of the Apollo Trio and the newest member of both the Manhattan String Quartet and the Walden Chamber Players.. Mr. Macomber is presently a member of the chamber music faculty of the Juilliard School, where he earned B.M., M.M., and D.M.A. degrees as a student of Joseph Fuchs. He is also on the violin faculties of the Manhattan and Mannes Schools of Music, and has taught at the Tanglewood, Taos and Yellow Barn Music Festivals.

NICHOLAS TOLLE is one of North America's premiere cimbalom artists. In 2017 he appeared as a soloist with Steven Schick and musicians from UCSD performing Pierre Boulez' *Repons* and will also present the complete solo and small ensemble cimbalom works of György Kurtág at Tufts University.

In August he will made his ninth visit to the Lucerne Festival to perform the works of Kurtág and Heinz Holliger. He has recently performed with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, the New York Philharmonic, and the International Contemporary Ensemble. In 2012 he was a soloist with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal performing Pierre Boulez' *Repons*, which he also performed with the composer conducting at the Lucerne Festival in 2009. He has appeared as a soloist with Collage New Music and Orchestra 2001 performing Steve Mackey's *5 Animated Shorts*, and with numerous orchestras performing Kodály's *Háry János Suite*. Based in Boston, MA, locally he can be seen regularly with such groups as the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Callithumpian Consort, and Sound Icon. He is also a frequent collaborator with Ensemble Signal. He is the founder and artistic director of the Ludovico Ensemble, and is the sole proprietor of Boston Percussion Rentals, New England's largest percussion rental company.

KATHRYN SCHULMEISTER is a double bassist with a wide range of musical and interdisciplinary interests. In March of 2017, Kathryn performed a 6-city tour of Switzerland and Luxembourg with the Lucerne Festival Young Artists, performing an experimental theater work incorporating dance and various styles of classical and contemporary music. With a passion for collaborating with composers to create new repertoire for the double bass, Kathryn's performance has been described as "...turning an ostensibly ungainly instrument into a writhing white-hot crucible." (5against4) Kathryn is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Contemporary Music Performance from the University of California, San Diego. She received her Bachelor of Music degree from the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston and completed her Master of Music degree at the McGill University in Montréal, receiving numerous scholarships and awards during her studies including the Austrian Society Scholarship, the Clara Lichtenstein Fellowship, the Graduate Excellence Award, and National Public Radio's 'From the Top' Scholarship.

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A black and white photograph of a city skyline at night, with numerous skyscrapers illuminated and their lights reflecting on the water in the foreground. The sky is dark, and the water shows a soft, blurred reflection of the city lights.

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