

# *Kafka Fragments, Op. 24*

## György Kurtág

Susan Narucki, soprano

Curtis Macomber, violin

Monday, May 2, 2022 - 7:00 p.m.  
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

### Book I

1. The Good March in Step
2. Like a pathway in autumn
3. Hiding places
4. Restless
5. Berceuse I
6. Nevermore
7. "But he just won't stop asking me"
8. Someone tugged
9. The seamstresses
10. Scene at the station
11. Sunday, 19 July 1910
12. My ear
13. Once I broke my leg
14. Enamored
15. Two walking sticks
16. No going back
17. Pride
18. The flower hung dreamily
19. Nothing of the kind

### Book II

The True Path

### Book III

1. To have, to be
2. Coitus as punishment
3. My fortress
4. I am dirty, Milena
5. Slept, woke
6. The closed circle
7. Destination, path, hesitation
8. As tightly
9. Hiding-places
10. In the struggle between yourself and the world
11. Amazed, we saw the great horse
12. Scene on a tram

### Book IV

1. Too late
2. A long story
3. In memoriam Robert Klein
4. From an old notebook
5. Leopards
6. In memoriam Joannis Pilinsky
7. Again, again,
8. The moonlit night dazzled us

## Program Notes:

György Kurtág's *Kafka Fragments*, Op.24 was completed in 1985 and is a sixty-five-minute work for voice and violin, set to fragments of texts from the diaries of Franz Kafka. The work is divided into four parts. The first, third and fourth parts consist primarily of movements that are short in duration and which vary widely in their range of expression. These brief, intense movements - many less than a minute long - are juxtaposed with several extended movements, which serve as a counterbalance, allowing us the opportunity to explore the composer's fantastical sound world more fully.

*Kafka Fragments* premiered almost forty years ago; since that time, it has been performed and recorded numerous times by several generations of singers and violinists. Why does the work continue to capture our imagination?

Kurtág's music - and *Kafka Fragments* is no exception - finds its power through an extraordinary and unlikely combination of elements. In the first place, the composer's idiosyncratic musical notation, in which duration, gesture and pulse are unmoored from the gravity and implied regularity of the bar line, enables musical asymmetry and spontaneity of delivery more akin to improvisation than that of earlier 20th century forms. In his works for voice, the composer's notation also facilitates his acute sensitivity to speech rhythms of whichever language he sets (in this case, German) with the effect of making the vocal line even more potent and immediate. And of course, Kurtág understands the materials with which he works; all that the voice and violin are capable of, separately and in combination.

But what takes this extraordinary work of vocal chamber music to another level is the composer's ability to illuminate human experience through musical expression. Kurtág is unafraid to travel to the extreme edge of our desire, frustration, ecstasy, near-madness, rage, and the endless search for moments of beauty and love that overwhelm us, fading as soon as they appear. Kafka's diary is full of these fleeting moments, whether they be the ache of longing as we remember a boat on a pond in the late afternoon, or the fantastic dream of a stallion bursting through the roof, the need to write when there is no more day or the hungry glimpse of a passer-by.

I have been studying and performing *Kafka Fragments* for decades. I have lost myself over and over in the limitless range of possibilities created through the fusion of these small fragments of texts with Kurtág's inexhaustible musical imagination. After thirty years, it remains a journey that I find to be irresistible.

-Susan Narucki

## Artist Bios:



### **Susan Narucki, soprano**

For over three decades, American soprano **Susan Narucki** has forged a unique path; her dedication to the music of our time has led to award winning recordings, critically acclaimed performances with musicians of the first rank and close collaborations with generations of composers. Since joining the faculty at the University of California at San Diego in 2008, she has been deeply engaged in commissioning, producing, and performing chamber operas that illuminate critical issues in society. Her projects have earned major philanthropic support from the MAP Fund /Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, UC MEXUS, Creative Capital Foundation, New Music USA and multiple awards from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Ms. Narucki commissioned and produced *Inheritance*, a chamber opera written by Grammy Award winning composer Lei Liang, addressing gun violence in America. Co-presented by ARTPower and the Department of Music at UC San Diego, *Inheritance* had its premiere performances in October, 2018.

Ms. Narucki also commissioned and produced *Cuatro Corridos* (2013), the critically acclaimed chamber opera that addresses trafficking of women across the U.S.- Mexico border. With libretto by internationally renowned Mexican author Jorge Volpi, and music by Hebert Vazquez, Arlene Sierra, Lei Liang and Hilda Paredes, the opera has been performed throughout the United States and Mexico and has had multiple broadcasts on Canal 22, Mexico's art and culture television network. Ms. Narucki's recording of *Cuatro Corridos* on Bridge Records earned a 2017 Latin Grammy Nomination and was a Critic's Choice of both *Opera News* and *Gramophone*.

In November of 2019, Ms. Narucki was nominated for a Grammy for Best Classical Vocal Recording for *The Edge of Silence: Vocal Chamber Music of György Kurtág* (AVIE Records). The recording was included in the *New York Times* Best Classical Tracks of 2019.



## **Curtis Macomber, violin**

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 contemporary music. Mr. Macomber’s extensive discography includes the complete Brahms and Grieg Sonatas; violin concertos by Martin Boykan and Laura Schwendinger; and hundreds of critically praised recordings of contemporary solo and chamber works. His CD of Roger Sessions Solo Sonata was acclaimed by American Record Guide as “one of the best recordings of 20th-Century solo violin music ever made.”

Mr. Macomber is a founding member of the Apollo Piano Trio and a member of the Da Capo Chamber Players and the Manhattan String Quartet. Past memberships have included the Walden Chamber Players and the New York Chamber Soloists. He was for many years the violinist of Speculum Musicae and has also appeared with the New York New Music Ensemble, Group for Contemporary Music, and in chamber music series across the country and in Europe.

Macomber is a longtime member of the chamber music faculty of The Juilliard School and the violin faculties of the Manhattan and Mannes Schools of Music, and has also taught at the Tanglewood Music Center and Taos School of Music. Other recent summer engagements have included Chamber Music Northwest and the Bard Festival. He holds his B.M., M.M., and D.M.A. degrees from the Juilliard School, where he was a scholarship student of Joseph and winner of the Morris Loeb and Walter Naumburg Prizes.

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