

In Honor and Memory of Robert Black

UC San Diego Bass Ensemble

Friday, March 8, 2024 at 5:00 p.m.
Conrad Prebys Music Center | Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Mantram (1987) - for Joëlle Leandre

Giacinto Scelsi

Night Garden (2013) for contrabass quintet

Robert Carl

Aphex Twin Quartets (2001)

Richard David James

arranged by Ryan McMasters (2012)

hy a scullyas lyf a dhagrow
kesson daslef
petiatil cx htdui

The Art of the Fugue Contrapunctus 1 -BWV 1080 (1742)
Chorale BWV 668 (1751)

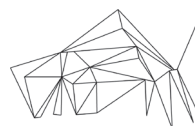
J.S. Bach

Darkness and Scattered Light (2023)

John Luther Adams

UC San Diego Bass Ensemble:

Matthew Henson, Andrew Crapitto, Angelica Pruitt,
Luke Holley, and Mark Dresser



UC San Diego

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES
Department of Music

In Honor and Memory of Robert Black

Robert Black was a mensch, a dynamic performer, and a superb bass player - a generous brother of the bass, committed to new music and community.

I first heard about Robert in 1984 during my first European solo tour, while performing mostly modern solo repertoire in addition to my own improvisations. I played at the Apollonhuis, a new music venue in Eindhoven, Netherlands.

After completing the concert I heard that Robert had performed there only a couple of weeks earlier, performing essentially the same repertoire “excellently!” Though not explicitly stated, it was clear that Robert had played that music more compellingly than I did. I decided then and there that I was going to focus more closely on my own musical path. Thank you, Robert!

Robert was also a devoted board member of the International Society of Bassists and established a recurring ISB commission for new compositions.

During the Covid pandemic, he streamed monthly solo recitals on YouTube, “New Music Friday’s.” For those not familiar with his solo work, I’d begin with those as well as his stellar discography.

—Mark Dresser

“Robert Black never said very much, and when he did it was always in gentle tones. (Beware though, his gentle tones often contained the barbs of one of the sharpest wits I ever encountered.) He didn’t have to say much because he let his bass do all the talking. From the moment I first heard him, years before I came to UCSD, Robert Black personified excellence as a bassist. I had never heard a sound like that or felt time like that. I quickly learned that he embodied the homonym of bass/base—both the lowest voice in the band and the foundation upon which the music was built. And in one of the great privileges of my life, I shared the stage with him more than three hundred times over the course of fifteen years, first as a part of the Bang on a Can Marathon concerts and later as co-founding members of the Bang on a Can All-Stars. Three hundred concerts where I never once wondered where the time was, or whether the ensemble knew how to tune a chord. Three hundred exhilarating concerts, on stages from Lincoln Center to the Barbican to the Sydney Opera House, where Robert was both our bassist and our base.

I heard he was sick from my friends and former band-mates Maya Beiser and Evan Ziporyn. They told me about the cancer but said, you know Robert, he’s going to be fine. But when I saw him for the last time at the Bang on a Can summer course at MassMoca in 2022 I knew that he wasn’t going to be fine. Maya and Evan knew it also. We just couldn’t allow ourselves to believe it—that the person who was the bedrock of our ensemble was crumbling. I had not been on a stage with Robert for nearly twenty years, but when he died part me crumbled also. How do you say goodbye to someone who was as impactful, as a musician and as a person, as Robert Black was? I am grateful to Mark Dresser and the UC San Diego Bass Ensemble for this meaningful tribute concert. That will help. But now that Robert is gone, I will also take solace in remembering his pilgrim soul: understated, elegant, utterly reliable, supremely musical.”

—Steven Schick

“I arrived at the Hartt School for my first (and what turned out to be only) job about the same time as Robert Black. I got to know him well early on because he was in the household of James Sellars, the chair of composition and my immediate boss. I was immediately taken with his modesty and charm, which belied a talent at genius level. He almost immediately requested a new work of mine, which turned out to be the first of five collaborations.

Aside from all of his exceptional strengths, I remember the sheer joy and sense of play that Robert projected in performance. Early on, I saw him give a performance of the Xenakis’s Theraps that beggared description. And on a more personal note, my very first year, for the annual MayDay concert, he and I premiered a piece of mine for two thunder sheets, a performance-art work designed as a sort of sonic duel. I’ll never forget his smiling face as he moved in on me for the kill.”

—Robert Carl

“Robert Black and I were friends and collaborators for almost thirty-five years. In the 1980s and ’90s, Robert was a member of my ensembles for Coyote Builds North America, Earth and the Great Weather, and Crow and Weasel, and my roommate on tour. A couple of years ago, Robert played with the JACK Quartet in a live performance with my electronic work Veils and Vesper. And the culmination of our work together was Robert’s extraordinary performances of my music for bass, two solo pieces and the bass quintet Darkness and Scattered Light, which he recorded just weeks before he left us.

Robert was one of the greatest musicians I’ve ever worked with, and one of the most humble, gentle, and generous human beings I’ve ever known. Our long friendship and musical partnership were among the great blessings of my life.”

— John Luther Adams

Special thanks: John Luther Adams, Robert Carl, Schuttenhelm, Thomas, Gary Knoble, Tracey Rudnick, Steve Schick, Jessica Flores and David Espiritu.