

Opera
BALTIMORE Salon Series

Our Stories: Queer Voices in Music from Past to Present

December 10, 2023

The Engineers Club

Brian James Myer, baritone
Aurelien Eulert, piano

from *Songs from an Unmade Bed*
The Other Other Woman

JAKE HEGGIE
MARK CAMPBELL

Hommes
Sonnet du trou de cul
Un peu de merde et de fromage
Monte sur moi

IAIN BELL
ARTHUR RIMBAUD & PAUL VERLAINE

Lilacs

JENNIFER HIGDON

from *All the Way Through Evening*
The Disappearance of Light
Train Station
Walt Whitman in 1989

CHRIS DEBLASIO
PERRY BRASS

INTERMISSION

from *6 Romances, Op. 38*
1. Серенада Дон-Жуана
4. О, если б ты могла

PYOTR ILYCH TCHAIKOVSKY
ALEKSEY KONSTANTINOVICH TOLSTOY

Iris & Roses
Iris and Roses
Unspoken
The Color of Morning

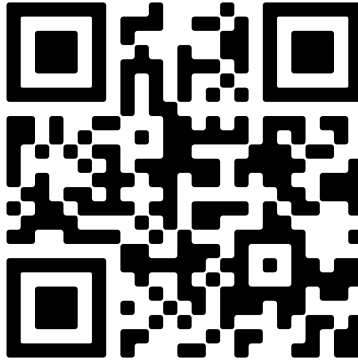
BRIAN JAMES MYER
JAY SAINT FLONO

The Afternoon Sun

BRIAN JAMES MYER
CONSTANTINE P. CAVAFY

In the Still of the Night
Take the "A" Train

COLE PORTER
BILLY STRAYHORN



Translations for Sonnet du trou de cul, Un peu de merde et de fromage, Monte sur moi.

** These three poems are explicit in nature and should be read with discretion*

Серенада Дон-Жуана

Гаснут дальней Альпухары
Золотистые края,
На призывный звон гитары
Выйди, милая моя!

Всех, кто скажет, что другая
Здесь равняется с тобой,
Всех, любовью сгорая,
Всех, всех, всех зову на смертный бой!

От лунного света
Зардел небосклон,
О, выйди, Нисета, о выйди, Нисета,
Скорей на балкон!

От Севильи до Гренады,
В тихом сумраке ночей,
Раздаются серенады,
Раздаётся стух мечей.

Много крови, много песней
Для прелестных льются дам,
Я же той, кто всех прелестней,
Всё, всё, песнь и кровь мою отдам!

От лунного света
Зардел небосклон,
О, выйди, Нисета, о выйди, Нисета,
Скорей на балкон!

Text: A.K. Tolstoy

О, если б ты могла

О если б ты могла хоть на единый миг
Забыть свою печаль, забыть свои невзгоды,
О, если бы хоть раз я твой увидел лик,

Don Juan's Serenade

The distant Alpujarra is fading,
Golden edges,
To the inviting sound of the guitar,
Come out, my dear!

Those who claim that another
Here can equal you,
All, burning with love,
All, all, all, I call to mortal combat!

The moonlight tints
The heavens in red,
Oh, come out, Nisetta, oh, come out, Nisetta,
Hasten to the balcony!

From Seville to Granada,
In the quiet twilight of nights,
Serenades resound,
The clash of swords is heard.

Much blood, many songs
Pour for charming ladies,
But I, who is lovelier than all,
Will give everything—song and blood!

The moonlight tints
The heavens in red,
Oh, come out, Nisetta, oh, come out, Nisetta,
Hasten to the balcony!

Oh, if only you could

If only for a single moment
You could forget your sorrow, your troubles,
Oh, if only once I could see your face,

Каким я знал его в счастливейшие годы!

Когда в твоих глазах засветится слеза,
О, если б эта грусть могла пройти порывом,
Как в теплую весну пролётная гроза,
Как тень от облаков, бегущая по нивам!

As I knew it in the happiest years!

When a tear glistens in your eyes,
Oh, if only this sadness could pass like a gust,
Like a fleeting spring storm,
Like the shadow of clouds running across the fields!

Text: A.K. Tolstoy

Program Notes

The Pulitzer Prize and Grammy Award winning operas of librettist/lyricist **Mark Campbell** are among the most successful in the contemporary canon. A prolific writer, Mark has created 40 opera librettos, lyrics for 7 musicals, and the text for 9 song cycles and 4 oratorios. Mark is also an advocate for contemporary American opera and serves as a mentor for future generations of writers through such organizations as American Opera Projects, American Lyric Theatre, and Washington National Opera's American Opera Initiative. In 2020, he created and is funding the Campbell Opera Librettist Prize, the first and only award for opera librettists. The award is given annually and administered by OPERA America. In 2022, he helped create and is funding the *True Voice Award*, administered by Washington National Opera, to help with the training of transgender opera singers.

Jake Heggie, born in 1961, is an acclaimed American composer and pianist renowned for his contributions to contemporary opera. Openly gay, Heggie's compositions often explore LGBTQ themes and human emotions with depth and sensitivity. His breakthrough opera, *Dead Man Walking*, based on Sister Helen Prejean's book, garnered international acclaim for its poignant exploration of capital punishment. Heggie's collaborative efforts with librettist Gene Scheer produced works like *Moby-Dick* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. Beyond his musical prowess, Heggie is celebrated for breaking barriers in classical music, using his artistry to address and amplify the diverse narratives within the LGBTQ community.

Described by the BBC as "...one of the 21st century's most compelling musical dramatists", **Iain Bell's** music has been thrilling audiences in the world's most prestigious concert halls and opera houses. Since the highly acclaimed world premiere of his first opera 'A Harlot's Progress' at Vienna's Theater an der Wien, his subsequent operas have been staged at houses including the Royal Opera House, Houston Grand Opera, Welsh National Opera, Trentino's Teatro Sociale, English National Opera, New York City Opera and Mexico City's Teatro de la Ciudad. Song is another cornerstone of Bell's output and recent highlights have included Mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton's world premiere of his ee cummings cycle 'of you' at Carnegie Hall, and a commission from the Salzburg Mozarteum to set selections from Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass' for bass-baritone Douglas Williams. In 2022, tenor Rolando Villazón toured his cycle of Nahuatl poetry throughout Europe and Bell's 'Beowulf', for the BBC Symphony & Chorus and tenor Stuart Skelton premiered thereafter at London's Barbican with actress Ruth Wilson as narrator. 2023|24 sees the world premiere of his orchestral suite 'Stonewall '69', new productions of 'Comfort Starving', 'The Man With Night Sweats' and 'A Christmas Carol', along with brand new song cycles for both the New York Festival of Song and Brooklyn Art Song Society, and further ahead brings the completion of his queer trilogy *Laid Bare*.

Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891), the visionary French poet, challenged societal norms with his groundbreaking works that defied traditional poetic conventions. Beginning his poetic journey at a

remarkably young age, Rimbaud's surreal and symbolist verses, such as "The Drunken Boat" and "A Season in Hell," earned him enduring acclaim. His affair with poet Paul Verlaine, marked by passionate creativity and personal strife, became infamous. Rimbaud's exploration of sexuality, including his homosexuality, further challenged conservative attitudes of the time. Despite a relatively brief literary career, Rimbaud's impact on modern poetry and his exploration of unconventional themes continue to influence generations of writers.

Paul Verlaine (1844–1896), a prominent French Symbolist poet, revolutionized 19th-century literature with his evocative and innovative verses. His work, marked by musicality and delicate symbolism, greatly influenced French poetry. Beyond his artistic contributions, Verlaine is notable for his tumultuous relationship with fellow poet Arthur Rimbaud, which scandalized society. Their tempestuous affair ultimately ended in a violent and public separation and led to Verlaine's imprisonment in 1873 for firing a gun at Rimbaud. Despite the legal consequences, his openly homosexual relationships and struggles with societal norms left an indelible mark on his legacy. Verlaine's poetic genius, entwined with the complexities of his personal life, continues to captivate literary enthusiasts worldwide.

Jennifer Higdon, born in 1962, stands as one of America's foremost contemporary composers, earning acclaim for her Grammy-winning compositions. Openly lesbian, Higdon's exceptional range encompasses orchestral, chamber, and vocal works. Her breakthrough, "blue cathedral," marked her prominence, and subsequent pieces like "Concerto for Orchestra" solidified her reputation. Higdon's Grammy-winning Violin Concerto and Pulitzer Prize-winning "Violin Concerto 1726" showcase her versatility. As a trailblazing figure in classical music, her openness about her sexuality contributes to broader inclusivity. Higdon's impact extends beyond her music, emphasizing the importance of diversity and representation in the traditionally conservative world of classical composition.

Walt Whitman (1819–1892), the influential American poet and essayist, revolutionized literature with his groundbreaking collection "Leaves of Grass." Celebrated as the "Bard of Democracy," Whitman broke societal conventions by openly expressing his homoerotic sensibilities in verses like "Calamus." A self-styled nonconformist, he celebrated the human body and same-sex affection, transcending 19th-century norms. While not explicitly using terms like "homosexual" due to historical context, Whitman's poems, like "Song of Myself," suggested a fluid approach to sexuality. His legacy endures not only for his literary innovation but also for contributing to a more open conversation about love and identity.

Pytor Ilych Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) had a personal life marked by tumultuous relationships, and he struggled with his own identity and feelings. His marriage to Antonina Miliukova in 1877 was short-lived and unhappy, and it is widely believed to have been a marriage of convenience. Tchaikovsky's correspondence with various individuals, including his brother Modest and close friend Nadezhda von Meck, contains expressions of deep emotional turmoil and self-doubt related to his sexuality. Additionally, there have been claims that Tchaikovsky's homosexuality was well-known within his social circles and was tolerated to some extent. However, due to the social and cultural norms of the time, he would have faced considerable stigma and potential legal consequences if his homosexuality were openly acknowledged.

Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy (1817–1875), a Russian poet, novelist, and playwright, played a significant role in 19th-century Russian literature. A distant relative of Leo Tolstoy, he began his literary career with romantic poetry but later embraced historical themes. Tolstoy's historical epic "Prince Serebrenni" and his drama "Tsar Boris" showcase his narrative prowess. Known for blending fiction with historical events, he also delved into social and philosophical commentary. Tolstoy's works, like "The

Death of Ivan the Terrible," reflect his interest in Russia's complex history. Despite personal and political challenges, his literary contributions continue to be appreciated in Russian literature.

Chris DeBlasio (1959–1993) is an American composer known predominantly for his songs. He attended New York University and the Manhattan School of Music, was known to have had a love for theater, and found support within the gay community in 1980s New York. Throughout the HIV/AIDS crisis of the time, DeBlasio's life was shaped by those around him, undoubtedly having a profound effect on his creative spirit. Ultimately, he died of AIDS-related complications in 1993.

Perry Brass, born in 1947, is an American author, journalist, and musician recognized for his impactful contributions to LGBTQ literature. Embracing his identity as a gay man, Brass has fearlessly explored themes of sexuality and identity in his works, including "How to Survive Your Own Gay Life" and "The Substance of God." A pioneer in queer literature, he co-founded the Gay Men's Health Crisis in the 1980s, addressing the AIDS crisis. Brass's writing, often reflecting his personal experiences, stands as a testament to his advocacy for LGBTQ rights and his dedication to fostering understanding through literature and activism.

Praised as an artist of "both voice and character to make him stand out in the crowd" (Sarasota Observer), baritone **Brian James Myer** has earned accolades for his exceptional artistry, combining a distinctive voice with captivating character portrayals. He made his debut as Figaro in Opera Delaware and Opera Baltimore's co-production of *The Barber of Seville* in 2022 and has worked in many companies across the United States including the Metropolitan Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Opera San Jose, and the Bard Summerscape festival.

Jay St. Flono (sopranist) is a classical singer, actor, librettist and author from Brooklyn, New York. Having performed in both avant-garde and traditional productions, Jay has worked with artists such as Bill T. Jones in "Deep Blue Sea" (2021) and has appeared with NYC Opera, the Unsung Collective at Lincoln Center and in concert as a soloist with the Grace Chorale of Brooklyn and SugarHill Salon. Jay was a 2019-2021 Librettist Fellow with Composers and the Voice (AOP) where they completed the libretto, Spirit in the Vine.

Cole Porter (1891–1964), renowned American composer and songwriter, was relatively open about his homosexuality despite the societal norms and legal restrictions of the time, especially within the entertainment industry. Porter is celebrated for his contributions to American musical theater and popular music, and his personal life has been the subject of interest and study by historians and biographers. His songs and compositions are still beloved and widely performed today, with some biographers believing that "In the Still of the Night" was written for one of his lovers.

Billy Clayhorn (1915–1967) was an American jazz musician, composer, arranger, and lyricist who worked closely with Duke Ellington for almost 30 years and had a significant impact on the career of famed singer Lena Horne. He was openly gay to his friends and bandmates, and some scholars hypothesize that his homosexuality is the primary reason he is not a more prominent figure in jazz history. Aside from his career as a musician, Clayhorn was also active in the Civil Rights Movement. After a years-long battle with esophageal cancer he died in the company of his partner in New York, where his ashes were spread along the Hudson River.

Constantine P. Cavafy (1863–1933), the revered Greek poet, crafted profound verses that immortalized his Alexandria upbringing. An influential figure in modern Greek literature, Cavafy subtly explored homoeroticism in his poems, reflecting his own homosexuality. Though often discreet due to the societal

norms of his time, works like "Ithaka" and "The God Abandons Antony" resonate with themes of desire and longing. Cavafy's poetic legacy transcends borders, with his introspective and sensual verses garnering global admiration. Posthumously recognized for his courage in addressing same-sex themes, Cavafy's impact extends beyond his era, influencing generations of poets and LGBTQ advocates.

Brian James Myer, baritone - Praised as an artist of "both voice and character to make him stand out in the crowd" (Sarasota Observer), Baritone Brian James Myer has earned accolades for his exceptional artistry, combining a distinctive voice with captivating character portrayals. Highlights of his 2022-23 engagements included performances as Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte* with both Opera Orlando and Norwalk Symphony Orchestra, David Miller in *Approaching Ali* at Opera Las Vegas, Milcom Negley in *The Last American Hammer* with Opera Grand Rapids, Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus* at the Bar Harbor Music Festival, and a role debut as Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Tri-Cities Opera and Syracuse Opera. Upcoming engagements for 2023-2024 include Rey in *Before Night Falls* with Opera Southwest and Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at Tri-Cities Opera. In the spring of 2021, Mr. Myer returned to New York City Opera as Alberto in their workshop of *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (Gordon/Korie) and in the 2021-2022 season, he reprised the role in the opera's world premiere. That season, he also joined the roster of The Metropolitan Opera as the cover of Marcellus/Player 4 in Brett Dean's *Hamlet* and made his Opera Delaware and Baltimore Concert Opera debuts as the title character in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. On the concert stage, Mr. Myer has appeared as soloist in Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Mozart's *Requiem* and *Coronation Mass*, Milhaud's *Cantate de Psaumes*, Bach's *Magnificat* and *Christmas Oratorio*, Rutter's *Mass of the Children*, and Brahms' *Liebeslieder Walzer* in venues across North America. He has recently made his Opera Orlando debut as part of their Opera in the Park summer concert series, performing as a member of "The Three Baritones" to sold-out audiences. The group has since released a new album entitled "Christmas Around the World". Mr. Myer holds Bachelor degrees in Music Education and Romance Languages from University of Nevada Las Vegas and a Master's degree in Vocal Performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Aurelien Eulert, piano - Hailing from Alsace, France, Aurelien Eulert made his U.S. house debut in 2014 with Palm Beach Opera as diction coach for their production of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and head coach for the Young Artist Program. Since then, he has been on the music staff of Charlottesville Opera, Opera Memphis, Opera Roanoke, Palm Beach Opera, Hawaii Performing Arts Festival, USC Thornton Opera, UCLA Alpert School of Music, Pacific Opera Project and the Los Angeles Opera Education department. Aurelien has played for acclaimed singers such as Marilyn Horne, Phyllis Curtin, Dawn Upshaw, Frederica von Stade and Rod Gilfry. He has assisted and performed under conductors such as James Conlon, Robert Spano and John Williams. In 2019, Aurelien was named Head of Music Staff at OperaDelaware, and oversaw the company's Young Artist Program. He had previously held the position of Chorus Master and Principal Pianist since 2017. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, he was instrumental in OperaDelaware's switch to digital and outdoor performances and continues to manage the acclaimed Pop-Up Opera program with outdoor presentations on the company's mobile stage. Aurelien's 2021/22 season included a return to the theatre stage with OperaDelaware and Opera Baltimore, and his debut with Opera Southwest for *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The 2022/23 season included debuts with Opera Philadelphia and Intermountain Opera Bozeman, and he will return with those companies in the 2023/24 season, in addition to Opera Baltimore & OperaDelaware's co-production of *Rigoletto* this past fall.

Aurelien holds degrees from the Conservatoire National de Strasbourg, Syracuse University and the University of Southern California, and attended the Tanglewood Music Center in the summer of 2010.