

Ekmeles presents

*Alphabet, Grammar,  
Litany, Macle*

Livestreamed from NYC, Philadelphia, and San Francisco

**October 16, 2020 at 8PM**

**Ekmeles**

Charlotte Mundy, soprano

Elisa Sutherland, mezzo-soprano

Tim Keeler, counter-tenor

Steven Bradshaw, tenor

Jeff Gavett, baritone and artistic director

Steven Hrycelak, bass

Charles Mueller, technical assistance

Elisa Sutherland and Charlotte Mundy, video

This performance is free to all, and will be online for one week  
following the live stream.

# Program

From the Grammar of Dreams (1988)

Kaija Saariaho (b. 1952)

Litany of the Whale (1980)

John Cage (1912-1992)

The Alphabet of the *Ars Brevis* (2016)

Agata Zubel (b. 1978)

Macle (1970-71)

Julius Eastman (1940-1990)

# Notes and Texts

## From The Grammar of Dreams

The texts used in this piece form from two books by Sylvia Plath: there are excerpts of her only novel, *The Bell Jar*, and fragments of the poem "Paralytic" from the poetry collection *Ariel*. The texts are strong, dealing with life and death, escaping into madness, self-destruction and the fight against it. Nevertheless, the piece includes an evolution: the painful nightmare ends in daylight and life. The emotional context of these texts, powerful in the extreme, led me to look for strict rules of musical organization, to contrast the emotional power. However, these rules do not always proceed in a rational or combinatorial thinking, but rather in the manner of our dreams, where thoughts are transformed into visual images with their colors, juxtapositions, movements, and directions. I have sought to operate in the same way by opening the text with two voices, and creating with them five different soundscapes.

-Kaija Saariaho

### Mvt. I.

Soprano:

It happens. Will it go on?----

My mind a rock,

No fingers to grip, no tongue,

My god the iron lung

That loves me, pumps

my two

Dust bags in and out,

Will not

Let me relapse

While the day outside glides by ticker tape.

The night brings violets,

Tapestries of eyes,

Lights,

The soft anonymous

Talkers: 'You all right?'

The starched, inaccessible breast.

Mezzo: A bad dream.  
I remembered everything.

**Mvt. 2**

Soprano:  
Dead egg, I lie  
Whole  
On a whole world I cannot touch,  
At the white, tight

Drum of my sleeping couch  
Photographs visit me-----  
My wife, dead and flat, in 1920 furs,  
Mouth full of pearls,

Two girls  
As flat as she, who whisper 'We're your daughters.'  
The still waters  
Wrap my lips,

Eyes, nose, and ears,  
A clear  
Cellophane I cannot crack.  
On my bare back  
A buddha, all  
Wants, desire  
Falling from me like rings  
Hugging their lights.

Mezzo:

I remembered the cadavers and Doreen and the story of the fig tree and Marco's diamonds and the sailor on the Common and Doctor Gordon's wall-eyed nurse and the broken thermometers and the Negro with his two kinds of beans and the twenty pounds I gained on insulin and the rock that bulged between sky and sea like a gray skull.

Maybe forgetfulness, like a kind of snow, should numb and cover them.

But they were a part of me. They were my landscape.

### **Mvt. 3**

Soprano and Mezzo:

The claw

Of the magnolia,

Drunk on its own scents,

Asks nothing of life.

### **Mvt. 4**

Soprano:

I thought I would swim out until I was too tired to swim back As  
I paddled on, my heartbeat boomed like a dull motor in my ears.

I am I am I am.

Mezzo:

I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart.

I am, I am, I am.

### **Mvt. 5**

Soprano and Mezzo:

I smile.

## **Litany of the Whale**

Cage's Litany for the Whale is a piece with a perfect title. It's memorable and strange, and gives the listener all the information she needs. The text for the work is a kind of solfege, where each letter of the word whale is idiosyncratically pronounced on a particular note. The hypnotic series of responses tying together a religious form with a natural subject is emblematic of Cage's connection to both Zen and Transcendentalism.

*-Jeff Gavett*

## The Alphabet of the *Ars Brevis*

The Alphabet fixes an order. The Artist fixes an order.

The Analysis raises question: how does it work?

The Machine raises question: how does it work?

However the Alphabet of the Artist is a collection of sounds, words, events – used in different conventions and configurations as expected.

How it works? The same for ages.

The composition was written as a part of a project „Die Logik der Engel“.

-*Agata Zubel*

## Macle

Macle, meaning a diamond or other crystal that is twinned, is a work as radical as its composer Julius Eastman. Its graphic and text instructions are by turns gnomic (“an inexpressible sound”, a scribbled circle in marker) and direct (“highest laughter possible”, “your favorite pop song”). Originally performed by Eastman along with other three non-vocalist members of SEM Ensemble, Macle was given its first performances in several decades by Ekmeles as part of the “That Which is Fundamental” series in 2017.

-*Jeff Gavett*

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The Alice M. Ditson Fund

