



Celebrating Marjorie Merryman

Member of the Composition Faculty from 2007 to 2022
and Former Provost and Senior Vice President
of Manhattan School of Music

**A Recital of Works by Marjorie Merryman
featuring MSM faculty, alumni, and students**

**With guest artists Anne Harley, soprano
and Jan Muller-Szeraws, cello**

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2022 | 3 PM
GORDON K. AND HARRIET GREENFIELD HALL

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PROGRAM

Marjorie Merryman

Echo

Xiao Wang (BM '13, MM '15, AD '16), violin*

Benjamin Larson (BM '09, MM '11), cello

Daniel Epstein, piano*

Two Songs

The Heart

Cassiopeia

Amber Evans (MM '18), soprano

Thomas Muraco, piano*

Four Images for Solo Cello

Fantasy Prelude

Invitation

Restlessness

In Memory

Jan Muller-Szeraws, cello

Miracles of Thekla

I. By the window

The young woman Thekla, soon to be married, sits by an open window. She hears Paul preaching about purity and chastity, and she decides to follow him.

II. First miracle

Thekla refuses to marry. Her spurned bridegroom and outraged mother demand that she be burned at the stake. But a miraculous rain quenches the flames, and she is freed.

III. The journey

Thekla follows Paul and longs to be baptized. On the road she is assaulted by a nobleman. She fends the rapist off, but Paul denies knowing her. She is arrested.

IV. Second miracle

Thekla is thrown into the arena with lions and bears, but a divine lioness saves her from harm. A lightning storm drenches the scene and Thekla declares that she is now baptized.

V. Miracle of the mountain

Thekla establishes herself in a mountain cave, performing healing and miracles for the local people. Priests and shamans in the area decide to defile her in order to curb her powers. The mountain itself opens to receive Thekla and to protect her for all eternity.

Anne Harley, soprano

Yu-Ting Cheng, clarinet/bass clarinet

Dan Lippel (DMA '06), electric guitar

Jonathan Collazo (MM '22), percussion

Kyle Ritenauer (BM '11, MM '15), Conductor*

Intermission

Marjorie Merryman

2020 Visions

Sirens

Surely kin to me

Shadows

Curtis Macomber, violin*

Margaret Kampmeier, piano*

Elegiac Songs

The Night Migrations

The White Lilies

Amber Evans, soprano

Yu-Ting Cheng, clarinet

Xiao Wang, violin*

Benjamin Larson, cello

Daniel Epstein, piano*

Wilde Epigrams

The Nature of Love

Education

Spleen

Scena: Muffins

Eva Martinez, soprano

Henry Griffin, baritone

Thomas Muraco, piano*

*Manhattan School of Music faculty member

PROGRAM NOTES

Echo

Echo (2009) is a piano trio in one movement, commissioned by the NY State Council for the Arts and Symphony Space for the Raphael Trio, to whom the piece is dedicated. The piece begins with a rather ghostly introduction in the piano, in which only three pitches sound: E, D, and C. These form a motto for the piece as a whole, coming back prominently, though transformed, at the central climax and again in the coda. *Echo* was written in memory of my husband Edward Cohen, who had known the Raphael musicians for many years. The expansions and “echoes” of the original motto relate to musical spellings of his name. The idea of forming the music around this personal reference suggested itself as I first imagined this work, and ultimately this became the organizing force.

Two Songs

Two Songs (2019) are settings of two beautiful poems by my daughter, Sarah Cohen. Both these texts are concerned with time and with the incomprehensible nature of both mortality and immortality. *The Heart* gives a yearning voice to our “striving, blind” physical nature. In the end the texture coalesces into a palpable heartbeat whose pulsation simply, finally stops. The text of the second song concerns the fate of Cassiopeia, a mythical Ethiopian queen who boasted that she and her daughter Andromeda were more beautiful than the goddesses of the sea. The sea god Poseidon punished her by binding her to a throne in the heavens, where she sits in darkness for eternity, her constellation circling the North Star. The poem offers a touching image of Cassiopeia as a passenger on a night train, sitting half-conscious through an endless journey. In my setting I tried to capture some of the spaciousness of this celestial story, and some of its futile, eternal circularity.

Four Images for Solo Cello

Four Images for Solo Cello (2016–17) presents a series of short, loosely related movements. The first, *Fantasy Prelude*, takes as its starting point a faint reference to Duke Ellington’s *Prelude to a Kiss* (particularly the half-diminished seventh chords). This short movement was written for a memorial concert for my husband, composer Edward Cohen, who enjoyed playing jazz at home and often played the Ellington. The reference is not at all literal. The second movement, *Invitation*, shifts to a soft, fluttering sound world characterized by harmonics and tremolos. A more flowing central passage hardly disturbs the overall sense

of restraint in this movement. *Restlessness*, the third movement, presents a faster tempo, irregular groupings, and stuttering, ricochet bowings. A contrasting section fractures the material into an unstable dialogue, leading to a return of the faster music. The set ends with *In Memory*, which refers to the feeling of something remembered but not quite grasped, like the edge of a dream.

Miracles of Thekla

A short monodrama, *Miracles of Thekla* (2019–20), chronicles events in the life of St. Thekla, a contemporary of St. Paul, who is regarded as a saint in Eastern Orthodoxy. The piece was written for Anne Harley, to whom it is dedicated, and was commissioned through an NEA Artworks grant. The five sections (listed in the program) are played without pause. A fragment of Eastern Orthodox chant (“Blessed are the pure”) is introduced in the first section and provides material throughout the piece. The third section makes extensive use of the Marian hymn *Ave Maris Stella*, which is associated with both purity and supplication for the safety of travelers.

Thekla’s mountain shrine was located in Maaloula, in modern Syria. Over centuries it became an important place of pilgrimage, and an active Orthodox convent still exists at this site. In 2013 Jihadist soldiers attacked the site and kidnapped nuns from the convent, echoing the themes of faith and women’s vulnerability that are central to Thekla’s story.

2020 Visions

2020 Visions (2020–22) are three movements based on a musical diary from the year 2020. In *Sirens*, the violin introduces the familiar minor-third siren sound that was a constant backdrop to life in New York City during the first months of the pandemic. *Surely kin to me* is a meditation on the death of George Floyd. The music quotes the spiritual-based hymn *In Christ There Is No East or West*, which is very familiar to me from childhood. The words assert universal brotherhood (all people “are surely kin to me”), but the events of the summer of 2020 demonstrated how far we are from this ideal. The final piece in this set, *Shadows*, was inspired by the beautiful and ever-changing shadows of Riverside Park, where I walked almost daily during the solitary pandemic times. The early afternoon shadows are brilliant and short, but because the park is completely open to the west, the afternoon shadows grow to extraordinary lengths and depths. The music’s imitative patterns, first short and close and then longer lines more widely separated, were inspired by these patterns.

Elegiac Songs

Elegiac Songs, for soprano and chamber ensemble, were composed in 2014–15. The music is structured around the evocative texts by Louise Glück.

Wilde Epigrams

Wilde Epigrams are four vocal duos commissioned in 2012 by a married couple. The commissioners had a particular request for this piece: they wanted duos that were not “gooey” or sentimental. As a fan of Oscar Wilde, I thought of his many epigrams and witticisms, which can be funny, barbed, or contrarian, but which rarely stray into sentimentality. To develop the texts, I combined some of Wilde’s sayings on a variety of topics, including love, education, and the bitter side of romance. Fans of the author will recognize the text of the last song as a chunk lifted from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in which these bantering lines are traded by the two male leads.

TEXT

Two Songs

The Heart

It was born of a spark it never knew,
and raised alone indoors.

Like a bear in winter
it must dream cave dreams.
Sage of interiors, it might travel
in a trance to other realms.

Even in rest
its vigilance can never falter.
Even in paradise
it would be striving, blind.

A girl bends over a sewing machine,
her stitches tiny and flawlessly even.

Imagine never taking a minute's rest
for decades, then resting forever.

Cassiopeia

Cassiopeia sits in her chair
wondering where the train is going
wondering where as blackness slips by
left and right she left her bag

Sitting upright in the stiff-backed chair

Get comfortable the conductor said
when she got on the night is long

Poems by Sarah Cohen, used with permission

Miracles of Thekla

Blessed. . .

A young girl, soon to wed.

The window was open and words came.

Holy Paul, his words woke me:

Blessed are the pure.

The window was open.

No! I cannot marry, cannot, will not come to the bridal bed.

The bridegroom seethes, my mother condemns me, but I cannot.

They say I must die then. Only the stake awaits me now.

The scorching heat, the purifying flames –

But rain comes, hail and trembling earth,

Miraculous clouds clothe me in their mist, and I am saved.

Oh Master Paul, let us travel together. Will you not bless me now?

But here a man comes – Oh stranger, force me not!

Master Paul, you say: “I do not know this woman,” and I am alone.

Oh Lord, whom I have made my confidence and my refuge, preserve me.

They carry me to the arena: roaring lions, bears, bulls.

The women cry out: “Unrighteous judgment, unjust!”

Throwing fragrant herbs to charm the snarling beasts.

A lioness, a lioness of the Lord protects me.

With lightning and fire the Spirit washes over me and I am baptized.

Now, on this mountain, by flame and water cleansed,

I have healed the sick, protected the poor, the women, the virgins.

I grow old and they come again, these men,

To take me. No.

Blessed are the pure, for they shall see God!

Oh mountain, open!

Open for me – I enter eternity.

Open! Open!

Elegiac Songs

The Night Migrations

This is the moment when you see again
the red berries of the mountain ash
and in the dark sky
the birds' night migrations.

It grieves me to think
the dead won't see them –
these things we depend on,
they disappear.

What will the soul do for solace then?
I tell myself maybe it won't need
these pleasures anymore;
maybe just not being is simply enough,
hard as that is to imagine.

The White Lilies

As a man and woman make
a garden between them like
a bed of stars, here
they linger in the summer evening
and the evening turns
cold with their terror: it
could all end, it is capable
of devastation. All, all
can be lost, through scented air
the narrow columns
uselessly rising, and beyond,
a churning sea of poppies—

Hush, beloved. It doesn't matter to me
How many summers I live to return:
This one summer we have entered eternity.
I felt your two hands
Bury me to release its splendor.

Poems by Louise Glück, from Averno and The Wild Iris, used with permission

Wilde Epigrams

The Nature of Love

Love is an illusion.

It is difficult not to be unjust to what one loves.

A man can be happy with a woman as long as he does not love her.

It is said that passion makes one think in a circle. A kiss can ruin a human life.

Love is an illusion.

Education

In my time, we were taught not to understand anything. That was the old system, and wonderfully interesting it was. But modern women understand everything—

—except their husbands—

And a very good thing, dear, I dare say. It might break up many a happy home if they did.

Spleen

She wore far too much rouge last night, and not quite enough clothes—

One should always be a little improbable. The very essence of romance is uncertainty.

—that is always a sign of despair in a woman.

I rely on you to misrepresent me.

Scena: Muffins

She: How can you stand there, calmly eating muffins? You seem to be perfectly heartless.

He: One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

She: I say it is perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

He: I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. And I'm particularly fond of muffins.

She: Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way.

He: Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat muffins in his own garden. And you have just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.

She: I said it was heartless of you, under the circumstances. That is a very different thing.

He: That may be. But the muffins are the same.

Texts by Oscar Wilde, drawn from a variety of sources

MARJORIE MERRYMAN

Composer Marjorie Merryman has been commissioned and performed throughout the United States and in many countries in Europe and Asia. Her catalogue includes orchestral, choral, vocal, and chamber music, as well as an opera and two oratorios. She has been the recipient of numerous awards, including prizes from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Walter Hinrichsen Award, the League of Composers/International Society for Contemporary Music, the WBZ Fund for the Arts, Composers-Inc (Lee Ettelson Award), and the New York State Council for the Arts. Her fellowships and grants include Tanglewood, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, and the National Endowment for the Arts. She has been Composer-in-Residence of the New England Philharmonic and the Billings (MT) Symphony Orchestra and has served on the boards of the New England Composers' Orchestra, the Lily Boulanger Foundation, and many others. Her works are published by C.F. Peters, E.C. Schirmer, APNM, and G. Schirmer, and recorded on the Koch and New World labels.

After more than 45 years of teaching, Marjorie retired in May 2022. Most recently she taught composition at Manhattan School of Music, where until 2017 she also served as Provost and Senior Vice President. She previously taught for 23 years at Boston University and has also taught at Harvard, New England Conservatory, and Macalester College.