Manhattan School of Music

FACULTY RECITAL

Allen Ginsberg's "Howl:" Reimagined

Justin Jay Hines (MM '98), Percussionist and Narrator

Featuring students from the MSM Jazz Arts Division

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2026 | 7:30 PM
ALAN M. AND JOAN TAUB ADES PERFORMANCE SPACE

Content Advisory

This poem, written in 1955–56, contains explicit and sustained references to drug use, sexuality (including graphic depictions), mental illness and institutionalization, suicide and self-harm, profanity, and racially charged language reflecting its era. It also engages frankly with psychiatric treatment (including electroshock therapy) and addiction.

"Howl" is a foundational text of the Beat movement and is widely taught for its innovations in form, its critique of postwar American conformity and capitalism, and its influence on subsequent generations of poets and musicians. Its raw language is intentional and central to its artistic and historical significance; the poem was the subject of a 1957 obscenity trial that became a landmark First Amendment case.

Readers who may be sensitive to depictions of psychiatric crisis, addiction, or suicidal ideation should feel free to step out or engage with the material at their own pace.

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PROGRAM

ALLEN GINSBERG
(1926–1997)

"Howl" (1956)
I
II
III

Justin Jay Hines (MM '98), Percussionist and Narrator
Alexander Grace (MM '28), trombone
Damon Poppleton (MM '28), saxophones
Lucy Southan (MM '27), bass
Leandro Hernández Waber (MM '28), piano

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

There are a few moments in Western culture where the disparate tributaries of society, art, and lived experience seem to all flow into a new and original ocean of creative expression. Perhaps Oct. 17th, 1954, was one of those moments. The poet Allen Ginsberg, experimenting with the hallucinogenic substance peyote, experienced a terrifying vision; the Sir Francis Drake Hotel, obscured by San Francisco's legendary fog, had transformed into a child-devouring demon of biblical magnitude. From this hallucination birthed the genesis of "Howl." In this poem, Ginsberg catalogues the totality of his American cultural zeitgeist; we witness madness, war, jazz, the Beat Generation, political radicals, homosexuality, illicit drug use, capitalism, Buddhism, suicide, psychotherapy, the mad house, ping-pong!, and a thousand references to the people (Carl Solomon, secret hero N.C.), places (Newark, New York, Denver), and haunting memories of his relatively youthful existence on Earth.

The poem demanded a new structure, some kind of poetic architecture that could support its heavy content. Ginsberg put no limits on his stream-of-consciousness inner muse, invented breath-phrase length, incorporated parataxis, arranged pyramidal phrases forming off a fixed base line, and even something he called a "bop chorus" of repeated sounds. The culminating result was shocking enough to put its publisher, Laurence Ferlinghetti, in jail for breaking obscenity laws. But thanks to some savvy lawyers at the American Civil Liberties Union, supported by some expert witnesses, the poem survived on its inherent literary value. Just as "Howl" came to Ginsberg in a hallucination, I also had a strange trip to its discovery.

In the summer of 1994, I was fortunate to attend the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California. After the festival, I hitched a ride with a lead-footed female tuba player who dropped me off in the middle of San Francisco. It was my first time in the City by the Bay. I had a place to stay for the night with a distant friend of a friend, but found myself with many hours to kill; I walked around the Embarcadero, got some clam chowder in a bowl fashioned out of sourdough bread, and fed the seagulls with wilted French fries. Then somehow, either by fate or complete accident, I stumbled upon City Lights bookstore. Overwhelmed by the number of books, I asked the cashier to suggest something; he turned around and grabbed one of the many copies of *Howl, and other poems.* This was my first encounter with Allen Ginsberg, the Beat Generation, and the epic poem "Howl."

In 1995, the same year I completed my undergraduate degree at Oberlin Conservatory, Ginsberg visited the college for what would be the last time (he died in 1997) and gave a very informal reading at the Co-Op Bookstore and Cafe.

He was bearded, wearing his ubiquitous tweed jacket, thick reading glasses, and he paused multiple times to see if the audio team could correct the treble of the lectern mic. He read a new poem titled "Ode to my Sphincter." I found it hilarious. He also read "Hum Bomb!" I found it hilarious *and* terrifying.

"Howl" then drifted in and out of my cultural radar over the next 29 years: Ginsberg's godson, my friend and classmate Aliah Rosenthal, attended MSM while I was here studying for my Master's degree; there was the super cool film *Howl* starring James Franco about the famous 1957 obscenity trial; and Phillip Glass used part of "Howl" as a libretto in his opera *Hydrogen Jukebox.* But one recent discovery of personal archeology shows at least some kind of subconscious beat poet undertow—around 2004 I was gifted an antique typewriter in exchange for recording percussion on a meditation CD. I must have consumed a liberal amount of whiskey one dark and stormy New York midnight to type out (or *attempt* to type out) the whole first page of "Howl" on that old dusty Remington Noiseless 77. I guess I wanted to *feel* Ginsberg's spirit under my fingers. I have no memory of doing it, but here was the paper proof, tucked into the back pages of my journal.

Three seasons ago, I was tasked with curating a fundraising concert for my nonprofit LAC (Living Arts Collaborative, Inc.). We rented a black box space at Arts On Site, located on St. Mark's Place, in the heart of the East Village. The concert theme, *400 Years of St. Mark's Place*, featured everything from indigenous Lenape chants, to 19th-century German Lieder, to 1950s jazz (the famous Five Spot Café was just across the street). I thought it would be cool to add a beat poem with live drumming accompaniment, like they used to do on the bongos, back in the heyday of the Village bohemian art scene. Considering Ginsberg frequently haunted Gem Spa (neither a gem store, nor a spa, but rather a bodega/newspaper hangout, surviving nearly 100 years on the corner of St. Marks and 2nd Ave, 1921-2020), choosing "Howl" for this program seemed like a good fit.

But how would it be manifested musically? What elements could the poetic text convey to the improvising musician? Should it be literal, contrary, or symbolic? Should the music be sound design, sound effects, or background? Should rhythms derive from the words, or should words be spoken rhythmically to match the groove? How much should be planned out? How much should be left to chance?

Arts On Site then produced a series of performances of "Howl" as a stand-alone solo show that I performed alongside jazz cornet improv master Kirk Knuffke. Thanks to Jamie Bernstein, who attended one of those performances, and recommended the show to the producers of the Village Trip Festival, it was booked at Bowery Poets last fall. Tonight's performance is the first at MSM, and

I would like to thank former classmate Matt Ward for putting in a good word to the higher-ups who decide such matters.

Seventy years on, "Howl" feels more relevant now than ever. Substitute his "*demonic industries…whose factories dream and croak in the fog…"* for today's technocratic AI billionaires, with their capitalist iv's pumping power and influence into the veins of corrupt government officials. Or consider the *"..boys sobbing in armies.."* in *"…the vast stone of war…"* Would Ginsberg be surprised to find his beloved US involved in yet another foreign military quagmire? For him, and his shell-shocked poet comrades, the two World Wars cast a long societal shadow, only to culminate in the absurdity of the Vietnam War. And sadly Ginsberg lived long enough to see the whole cycle repeat itself in the 8-bit-video-game-named *Operation Desert Storm,* of my own generation's regretful invention. And what would he make of the neo-con book bans in school libraries across the American Heartland? Could he relate to the absurdity of removing "…*obscene odes*…" by LGBTQ, POC, and other non-mainstream authors, while students cower in their classrooms during active shooter drills? Who will save the children from the drag-queen storytellers! Are we truly living in a time "…*where the faculties of the skull no longer admit the worms of the senses*…?"

All this being said, let's let the poem speak for itself.

—Justin Jay Hines
New York City, 2026

Justin Jay Hines (MM '98), Percussionist and Narrator

Percussionist, composer, and educator Justin Jay Hines (MM '98) has performed with the New York Philharmonic, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Moab Music Festival, Alarm Will Sound, Either/Or, BridgeMusik, Austin Classical Guitar, and the Chamber Music Society of Detroit. As a Broadway musician, he has played on many Tony Award-winning productions, including Disney's *Tarzan*, and the original *In the Heights*. He has served as a New York Philharmonic Teaching Artist since 1997 and has hosted seven Young People's Concerts, including this past season's *The Future is: Innovation* alongside composer Missy Mazzoli.

As a leader of interactive education experiences, Hines has collaborated with The Juilliard School, NYU, St. Louis Symphony, New World Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, 92nd Street Y, Lincoln Center Education, Carnegie Hall, League of American Orchestras, and the Caramoor Center for the Arts. As a composer, his classical compositions have been performed by his chamber music ensemble Classical Jam at venues throughout the United States and Asia. Currently he is a composition mentor for the New York Philharmonic's Very Young Composers Program, and is the artistic director of Living Arts Collaborative, Inc.

He joined the Manhattan School of Music faculty in the fall of 2022 with the Center for Career Readiness and Community Impact, and is a proud recipient of Manhattan School of Music's Pablo Casals Award for Community Outreach. Most recently, his original recitation of Ginsberg's "Howl" for drum set and improvising musicians was presented by the Village Trip Festival, Arts on Site, and the New York Public Library.

ABOUT MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Founded as a community music school by Janet Daniels Schenck in 1918, today MSM is recognized for its more than 1,000 superbly talented undergraduate and graduate students who come from more than 50 countries and nearly all 50 states; its innovative curricula and world-renowned artist-teacher faculty that includes musicians from the New York Philharmonic, the Met Orchestra, and the top ranks of the jazz and Broadway communities; and a distinguished community of accomplished, award-winning alumni working at the highest levels of the musical, educational, cultural, and professional worlds.

The School is dedicated to the personal, artistic, and intellectual development of aspiring musicians, from its Precollege students through those pursuing doctoral studies. Offering classical, jazz, and musical theatre training, MSM grants a range of undergraduate and graduate degrees. True to MSM's origins as a music school for children, the Precollege Division is a professionally oriented Saturday music program dedicated to the musical and personal growth of talented young musicians ages 8 to 18. The School also serves some 2,000 New York City schoolchildren through its Arts-in-Education Program, and another 2,000 students through its critically acclaimed Distance Learning Program.

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Contact the Philanthropy Office at **917-493-4434** or to make an online gift, **scan this code** or visit **msmnyc.edu/givenow**.

Land Acknowledgment

We want to acknowledge that we gather as Manhattan School of Music on the traditional land of the Lenape and Wappinger past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit as well.