



MUSIC OF remembrance[®]
ensuring that the **voices of musical witness be heard[®]**

INTONATIONS:

Songs from the Violins of Hope

**Streaming
August 1 – August 31, 2021**

MUSIC OF REMEMBRANCE (MOR) fills a unique cultural role in Seattle and throughout the world by remembering the Holocaust through music with concert performances, educational programs, recordings and commissions of new works.

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Mina Miller, Artistic Director • 23RD Season

INTONATIONS: *Songs from the Violins of Hope*

Streaming August 1 – August 31, 2021

Welcome and Introductory Remarks
Mina Miller, Artistic Director

INTONATIONS: *Songs from the Violins of Hope* (2020)

Music by Jake Heggie

b. West Palm Beach, FL, 1961

Texts by Gene Scheer

b. New York, NY, 1958

Inspired, in part, by the book *Violins of Hope: Violins of the Holocaust – Instruments of Hope and Liberation in Mankind's Darkest Hour* by James Grymes (Published by Harper Perennial. Used by permission.)

Ashes
Exile
Concert
Motele
Feivel
Lament
Liberation

Laura Krumm, mezzo soprano

Mikhail Shmidt, solo violin

Zoe Lonsinger, youth solo violin

Artur Girskey, violin **Elizabeth Phelps, violin**

Susan Gulkis Assadi, viola **Walter Gray, cello**

Production Director

Erich Parce

Audio Engineer

Dmitriy Lipay

Cameras

Bill Mohn

Post Production

Andrew Mayatskiy

Executive Producers: Mina Miller and David Sabritt

Artistic Director's Message

August 1, 2021
Seattle

It is our deep honor to conclude our 23rd season with very special programs of two transformative works by composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer, *For a Look or a Touch* and *INTONATIONS: Songs from the Violins of Hope*.

Music of Remembrance's association with Jake and Gene goes back fifteen years to our very first commission with this extraordinary team. They created the musical drama *For a Look or a Touch*, which was the first and to date remains the only major musical work to address the Nazi persecution of gay people. *For a Look or a Touch* was followed in 2012 by the powerful monodrama *Another Sunrise*, an intimate portrayal of a survivor's struggle to come to terms with her own story. The haunting and inspiring song cycle *Farewell, Auschwitz* followed in 2013, based on poetry written in Auschwitz that gave hope to people trapped in circumstances we can hardly begin to imagine. Their 2016 opera *Out of Darkness* wove these stories together in a profound tribute to the power of memory.



Many people consider Jake Heggie the most important American opera composer today. His opera *Dead Man Walking* was slated for a new production this April at the Metropolitan Opera, with a worldwide HD broadcast, until the pandemic forced the Met to cancel its entire season. Gene Scheer's words touched the hearts of countless millions when President Biden shared inspiring lines from Gene's song "American Anthem" in his inauguration address. But what stays with me most of all is the rare gifts that make Jake and Gene's works so special. They have the courage to ask painful and difficult questions. They probe deep human emotions with unflinching honesty, evoking compassion but never pity. And they do this with hauntingly beautiful music and lyrics that stay with us long after the final notes.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mina Miller".

Mina Miller, founder and artistic director

About the Music

INTONATIONS: Songs from the Violins of Hope (2020)

Music by Jake Heggie

b. West Palm Beach, FL, 1961

Texts by Gene Scheer

b. New York, NY, 1958

Commissioned by Music at Kohl Mansion
World premiere by Music at Kohl Mansion on January 18, 2020

In recognition of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, and to the memory of those who found strength, solace and hope in music during the Holocaust.

Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer offer the following remarks:

In February of 2017, Patricia Kristof Moy reached out to tell us about the Violins of Hope project. She explained the almost unimaginable history and journey of these 86 instruments, played by prisoners in concentration camps, restored over the past four decades in Tel Aviv by Amnon and Avshalom Weinstein. The collection had already been to major cities around the world. Patricia and Music at Kohl Mansion wanted to bring them to the West Coast for an extended, Bay Area-wide residency with orchestras, chamber groups, schools, community centers, religious organizations and more.



Central to this ambitious project, Patricia wanted to commission us to create a new composition to be premiered as part of the 75th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz. We were floored. And we immediately said yes. Shortly thereafter, the project was awarded a 2017 Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions Grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

By then, we had already created several large-scale works for Music of Remembrance in Seattle. For 23 years, Artistic Director Mina Miller has devoted her remarkable organization to remembering artists silenced in the Holocaust, and to commissioning new works to give voice to the voiceless – to tell the stories of a broad array of victims and survivors. She inspired us to take on the responsibility of keeping these stories alive.

Music at Kohl's project presented us with a new opportunity: to tell stories of the instruments actually being played. The singers of the Holocaust are gone, but these instruments – 70 violins, 1 viola and 1 cello – still exist to sing, vibrate and intone. These are instruments that have been held by many hands and rested on many shoulders through generations; some have vibrated with music by revered composers, others were specifically Klezmer instruments. Violins of Hope.

Fortunately, many of the instruments' histories had been shared with the Weinstains. Some of these stories are documented in James Grymes' book *Violins of Hope: Violins of the Holocaust*. It was an invaluable resource.

We decided that our piece would be a dramatic song cycle with a solo violinist, a solo singer as the voice of the violin, and a quartet of the original instruments. Each song would intone, or tell, a story from the perspective of the violin itself. This way, we could use music and words to explore the physical and emotional journeys of the instruments.



Gene read and researched the stories in the book and other sources, and found six he wanted to explore. The first song, “Ashes,” is told from the perspective of one of the first violins Amnon Weinstein restored. When he removed the case, he discovered it was filled with human ashes. How could this happen? A journey ends and another begins.

In “Exile,” we have the perspective of the violin played by Erich Weininger. Exiled from Germany, on a ship, with Palestine at last in sight, Erich and the other refugees suddenly realized there was no more fuel for the furnace. The boat was listing and sinking. The call went out to use any and all wood on the ship to feed the furnace. Erich wondered if his beloved violin was just another piece of wood to feed the flames. Eight decades later, the violin still sings.

Prisoners were often forced to entertain Nazi officers in the camps. “Concert” tells the harrowing story of Henry Meyer when he was ordered to play a concert in the reverberant gas chamber, where family and friends were murdered every day. He apologizes to the violin and plays a waltz while an undertow of emotion pulls him down. But thanks to the violin and the music, he survives another day.

Motele Schlein was a child prodigy with a promising career when he and his family were imprisoned. After his family was murdered, he was randomly selected to entertain at the Nazi Officers Club. At 12 years old, he devised a plan to avenge his family. Week by week, he smuggled gunpowder in his violin case to create a bomb in the basement of the Officers Club. He set it on fire and ran to the woods to watch the explosion and witness the destruction. Through it all, he was never really alone. He always had his violin and music.

Feivel Wininger’s is a story of legacy through music. An older man, distraught from the losses of the war, gave his violin to Feivel so he could make a living with music. After the first wedding he played, Feivel was paid in loaves of bread and returned to give the old man half of what he had earned. The old man had taken his life. But Feivel went on to save many others, generations that now thrive thanks to the kindness of that old man, his violin and the music of hope.

The sixth section of *Intonations* is a *Lament* for string quartet. Here, the instruments sing a song without words.

The liberation of Auschwitz began on January 27, 1945. The final song is inspired by Paula Lebovic’s recollection of that day and the kindness she received from a Russian soldier. Her experience and the experience of millions of others who were sent to the camps is something that must not be forgotten. May the voices of the millions who perished, distilled into the sound of these remarkable violins, remind us of the late Elie Wiesel’s words: “as we remember the past, we must remember to always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

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About the Artists



Jake Heggie, composer, was born in West Palm Beach, Florida and has made his home in San Francisco since 1993. Heggie has been drawn to topics that reflect his passion for human rights and social justice (as well as his love of literature), and his operas have been acclaimed for their emotional honesty and dramatic power. Those operas include *Dead Man Walking*, *Moby-Dick*, *It’s A Wonderful Life*, *If I Were You*, *Great Scott*, *Three Decembers* and *Two Remain*, among others. He has also composed nearly 300 songs, as well as chamber, choral and orchestral works. The operas — most created with Gene Scheer or the late Terrence McNally — have been produced on five continents. *Dead*

Man Walking (with McNally) has been recorded twice and in 2019 received its 70th international production, making it the most-performed American opera of our time. New York's Metropolitan Opera recently announced that it will produce *Dead Man Walking* in a bold new production by director Ivo van Hove, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin. *Moby-Dick* (with Scheer) was telecast throughout the United States as part of *Great Performances'* 40th Season and released on DVD (EuroArts). *Great Scott* was a 2019 Grammy Award nominee for Best New Composition, Classical. Heggie was awarded the Eddie Medora King prize from the UT Austin Butler School of Music and the Champion Award from the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus. A Guggenheim Fellow, he has served as a mentor for the Washington National Opera's American Opera Initiative and is a frequent guest artist at universities, conservatories and festivals throughout the USA and Canada. *INTONATIONS: Songs from the Violins of Hope* (Scheer) was premiered in January 2020, and the live recording released shortly thereafter. *Songs for Murdered Sisters*, a song cycle to new poems by Margaret Atwood, was premiered in spring 2021, and *Intelligence* (Scheer), a new opera for the Houston Grand Opera is scheduled for 2022. jakeheggie.com



Gene Scheer, librettist, is a native of New York City, where he currently resides. With Jake Heggie — an avowed champion of writers — Scheer has helped build a remarkable creative partnership that includes Heggie's four MOR commissions. He was also the librettist for many of the composer's other major works: *Moby-Dick*; *Pieces of 9/11 - Memories from Houston*; *A Question of Light*; *Three Decembers*; the lyric drama *To Hell and Back*; the song cycles *Statuesque* and *Rise and Fall*, *Camille Claudel: Into the Fire*; *It's A Wonderful Life*; and *If I Were You*. With Steven Stuckey he wrote the Grammy-nominated oratorio *August 4th 1964*, which was premiered and recorded by the Dallas Symphony.

With Tobias Picker he wrote *An American Tragedy*, which had its premiere at the Metropolitan Opera. The Chandos CD of the opera *Thérèse Raquin*, Scheer's first collaboration with Picker, was cited by Opera News as one of the ten best recordings of 2002. For Dallas Opera in 2015, Scheer collaborated with Joby Talbot on the opera *Everest*, based on interviews from survivors of the 1996 Everest expedition. With Jennifer Higdon, Scheer wrote an operatic adaptation of *Cold Mountain*, which premiered in the summer of 2015 at Santa Fe Opera. This work won the International Opera award, presented in London, for the best world premiere in 2015. Along with Higdon, Scheer was nominated for a Grammy for his work on *Cold Mountain* for best classical composition. Scheer is also a gifted composer in his own right. He has written a number of songs for singers such as Renée Fleming, Sylvia McNair, Stephanie Blythe, Jennifer Larmore, Denyce Graves, and Nathan Gunn. The distinguished documentary filmmaker Ken Burns prominently featured Scheer's song "American Anthem" (as sung by Norah Jones) in his Emmy-winning World War II documentary for PBS titled *The War*. Scheer's words touched the hearts of countless millions when President Biden shared inspiring lines from "American Anthem" in his inauguration address. *Intelligence*, Scheer's newest opera with Jake Heggie, will receive its world premiere with Houston Grand Opera in 2022



Laura Krumm, mezzo soprano, makes her first MOR appearance. No stranger to the music of Jake Heggie, Krumm has performed his *Camille Claudel: Into the Fire*, and interpreted the role of Sister Helen Prejean in *Dead Man Walking*. A graduate of San Francisco Opera's prestigious Adler Fellowship program, she has performed in SFO's mainstage productions of *Elektra*, *Manon*, *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*. This spring she starred as Rosina in the company's imaginative new production of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. The rising artist made her Metropolitan Opera debut in *Manon* in 2019. At home with new music as well as traditional repertoire, Krumm has performed in Jack Perla's

Love/Hate, and in the premiere of Nolan Gasser's *The Secret Garden*. On the concert stage her performances have ranged from *Bach's B-minor Mass* to Kaija Saariaho's *Adriana Songs* and Peter Lieberson's *Neruda Songs*.

Mikhail Shmidt, violin, has been a member of the Seattle Symphony since 1990. He received his master's degree from the Gnessin Institute of Music. Shmidt has performed with the Moscow State Symphony and



the Moscow Radio String Quartet, and as concertmaster of the Camerata Boccherini Chamber Orchestra. He has recorded for Melodiya and Erato, and toured extensively in the USSR and in Eastern and Central Europe. A central artistic participant with Music of Remembrance since its inception, Shmidt can be heard as violinist in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *For a Look or a Touch* (Naxos 2008), Paul Schoenfield's *Camp Songs and Ghetto Songs* (Naxos 2009), Lori Laitman's *Vedem* (Naxos 2011), Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Out of Darkness* (Naxos 2014), and Tom Cipullo's *After Life* (Naxos 2016) and *The Parting* (Naxos 2020).

Zoe Lonsinger, violin, first appeared with MOR at age 14 as the 2019 recipient of our David Tonkonogui Memorial Award for Young Artists. Zoe made her orchestral solo debut with the Danbury Symphony when she was eight and has since performed as a soloist with Waterbury Symphony, the American Chamber Orchestra, Bridgeport Symphony, Hamden Symphony and the Ottawa Chamber Symphony. She recently was featured as a young artist by Project Music Heals Us, and has received awards in competitions across the country and around the world.



Ben Vanhougen, photo



Artur Girsky, violin, was born in Riga, Latvia, into a family of violinists, and began playing violin at age 5. He studied with Maya Glezarova at the Moscow Central Music School and with Felix Andrievsky at the Royal College of Music in London. Girsky won Third Prize at the International Violin Competition of Naples and he served as Concertmaster of the Moscow Soloists chamber orchestra under the baton of world-renowned violist Yuri Bashmet. In 1997 Girsky joined The Florida Orchestra as Principal Second Violin. He has been a member of the Seattle Symphony since 2006 and is also a member of the Girsky Quartet.

Elizabeth Phelps, violin, embraces a repertoire spanning centuries and genres, from period-instrument performances of the early baroque to contemporary works and collaborations with singer-songwriters. The New Haven, Connecticut native began violin just shy of her fourth birthday. Following a fellowship with the New World Symphony, Elizabeth was Principal Second Violin of the North Carolina Symphony in Raleigh for four years. She has performed with the Seattle Symphony, Grand Teton Music Festival Orchestra, Grant Park Symphony Orchestra, Verbier Festival Orchestra, Des Moines Metro Opera Orchestra, and the Artosphere Festival Orchestra.



Ben Vanhougen, photo



Susan Gulkis Assadi, viola, has been the principal violist of the Seattle Symphony since the 1992-93 season. She enjoys a varied career as an orchestral player, chamber musician, soloist and teacher. In addition to the Seattle Symphony, she performs regularly with Seattle Opera and The Governor's Chamber Music Series, and was a founding member of the Seattle-based Bridge Ensemble. She plays viola in *Rudolf and Jeanette* on MOR's *Schoenfield and Schwarz* (Naxos 2009), and in David Stock's *A Vanished World* (the MOR commission composed specifically for her) and Schulhoff's *Five Pieces for String Quartet* on MOR's *Art from Ashes, Vol. 1*.

Walter Gray, cello, has been a member of the Seattle Symphony for four decades. A founding member of the Kronos Quartet and the new music ensemble Quake, he produced and performed on *Seven Mirrors*, music of Chinariy Ung (New World Records). He can also be heard on MOR's recording of Paul Schoenfield's *Camp Songs and Ghetto Songs* (Naxos 2009), Lori Laitman's *Vedem* (Naxos 2011), Jake Heggie's *Out of Darkness* (Naxos 2014), and Tom Cipullo's *After Life* (Naxos 2016) and *The Parting* (Naxos 2020).



Heartfelt Thanks

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Donna Benaroya – violist Susan Gulkis Assadi
Bernice Lindstrom – mezzo soprano Laura Krumm
James and Sherry Raisbeck – violinist Mikhail Shmidt

and

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With deep gratitude to Amnon and Avshalom Weinstein, whose collection of lovingly restored instruments has inspired people around the world with their message of hope and memory.



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