

Thursday Evening, May 18, 2023, at 8:00

The Juilliard School

presents

Juilliard Orchestra

David Robertson, *Conductor*

REENA ESMAIL (b. 1983) *RE|Member* (2021; New York premiere)

JOHN ADAMS (b. 1947) *Harmonielehre* (1985)

Part 1

Part 2: The Anfortas Wound

Part 3: Meister Eckhardt and Quackie

Performance time: approximately 50 minutes, without an intermission

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continued

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are turned off during the performance.*

About the Program

By Cornelia Sommer

RE|Member

REENA ESMAIL

Born: February 11, 1983, in Chicago

The title of the piece *RE|Member*, by Reena Esmail (BM '05, composition), is rich with meaning. As the Seattle Symphony's composer in residence, Esmail had originally planned this overture to be premiered at the beginning of the orchestra's 2020-21 season. Due to the pandemic, the premiere got pushed back by a year, and it had its premiere on the first concert of the 2021-22 season instead—the first relatively normal season after a year and a half of shutdown and virtual performances. The first interpretation of the work's title has to do with the musicians and audiences coming together again: "re-membering." The second is the word "remember" itself—though the premiere was at a live, in-person concert, Esmail wanted to pay tribute to the memories of the diverse experiences people had during the pandemic's isolation. As an added—and unintentional—bonus, Esmail's initials "R.E." also make an appearance in the title.

The music of *RE|Member* was inspired by two well-known opera overtures, both often performed as concert pieces: Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and Bernstein's *Candide*. Like those two works, Esmail's is full of energy and excitement with contrasting lyrical sections. But in contrast, Esmail's overture opens and closes with cadenza-like proclamations for solo oboes, one of which is physically separated from the orchestra onstage. The plaintive melody, as well as the isolation of the oboist, again recalls the pandemic's effect on music-making.

Harmonielehre

JOHN ADAMS

Born: February 15, 1947, in Worcester, Massachusetts

"I found myself on a dirt road in a dark, damp winter forest ... I was carrying two babies in my arms, twins. Out of the damp, nocturnal gloom a malevolent-looking man in an overcoat suddenly appeared in front of me ... He reached out to grab one of the babies from me. A violent struggle ensued. I knew that it was Schoenberg and that he was trying to abduct my children."

In this passage from his autobiography *Hallelujah Junction*, John Adams recounts a haunting dream he had during a period of anxious writer's block that was broken with the composition of *Harmonielehre* (1985). The menacing composer Arnold Schoenberg figured strongly not only in Adams' subconscious but also as an influence on the piece itself, beginning with its title: *Harmonielehre* is also Schoenberg's famed 1911 treatise on tonal harmony. Adams' *Harmonielehre*, with the late Romantic style as a primary musical influence, makes a bold statement in rejection of Schoenberg's 12-tone system and the hold it has had over composers since the mid-20th century.

Though Adams was a child when Schoenberg died, the two have a personal connection: Adams' teacher Leon Kirchner was one of Schoenberg's pupils. Partially through Kirchner's teachings, Adams respected Schoenberg as a great master, a composer on the level of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. At the same time, however, he found something off-putting about the relationship between Schoenberg's musical style and his role in the musical world. Adams writes in his own program notes on *Harmonielehre*: "[Schoenberg] was the first composer to assume the role of high priest, a creative mind whose entire life ran unfailingly against the grain of soci-

ety, almost as if he had chosen the role of irritant." Adams' discomfort with Schoenberg's role is shaped by Adams' own dislike of 12-tone music, the system that Schoenberg invented and touted as the natural extension, and ultimate pinnacle, of German art music. Adams continues, "His aesthetic was to me an overripening of 19th-century Individualism, one in which the composer was a god of sorts, to which the listener would come as if to a sacramental altar." Schoenberg's compositional techniques were deeply influential to other composers and often reigned supreme in the academic culture of the late 20th century, but his music, and later composers' extensions on his musical style, failed to gain traction with audiences. Adams' response to this dichotomy was opposed to the attitude of composers of the academy: Rather than worship the man and utilize his innovations regardless of audience response, Adams rejected Schoenberg's model, an act that he likens to "siding with the Philistines."

It was due in part to these professional and aesthetic issues that Adams found himself in a creative slump for an 18-month period leading up to the composition of *Harmonielehre*. Although the piece does tackle Adams' feelings about Schoenberg head on, it is by no means a parody of Schoenberg's music. (In contrast, Adams' 1992 *Chamber Symphony* does satirize Schoenberg's Op. 9 work of the same name.) Rather, Adams rejects Schoenberg by recalling the musical aesthetic of the period directly preceding Schoenberg's turn to atonality and the 12-tone system. Adams describes the style of *Harmonielehre* as a combination of late Romanticism with minimalism. The music references the styles of several late Romantic composers, even directly paying tribute to certain works, including Sibelius' Symphony No. 4, Mahler's unfinished Symphony No. 10, and Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*, an early tonal work. These Romantic sounds are most apparent in the slow middle sec-

tion of the first movement as well as the second movement, but the harmonic language pervades fast sections as well, seamlessly integrated into minimalist techniques.

In addition to the music of the late Romantic, Jungian archetypes from mythology and dreams serve as an important influence on *Harmonielehre*. At the time of its composition, Adams was engrossed in the writings of Carl Jung, the Swiss psychoanalyst who pioneered concepts such as archetypes and the collective unconscious. Jung believed that archetypes, universal and symbolic images and ideas, manifested themselves most purely in dreams and folklore. Archetypes found in dreams inspired both the first and third movements of *Harmonielehre*. For the first movement, Adams recounts a dream in which he saw "a gigantic supertanker take off from the surface of San Francisco Bay and thrust itself into the sky like a Saturn rocket." The second movement, "The Anfortas Wound," is inspired by Jung's archetypal interpretation of the legendary character Anfortas, who Adams describes as symbolizing "a condition of sickness of the soul that curses it with a feeling of impotence and depression." The third movement, "Meister Eckhardt and Quackie," refers to a dream in which Adams' daughter, briefly nicknamed Quackie, "rides perched on the shoulder of the medieval mystic, Meister Eckhardt, as they hover among the heavenly bodies like figures painted on the high ceilings of old cathedrals."

Harmonielehre's extramusical inspirations may seem eclectic, but they fit into a common theme in Adams' works. He often explains the subject matter of his music, especially his operas, as modern-day mythology. The ancient mythologies of various cultures have provided inspiration for composers from antiquity through the present; the universality of these narratives have an irresistible pull over both composers and audiences. Adams sees his topics as part of

the same tradition, exploring the archetypal qualities of recent history's public figures and events. His first opera, *Nixon in China* (1987), dramatizes Richard Nixon's highly publicized visit to China in 1972 while president, and later operas, including *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991) and *Doctor Atomic* (2005), use similarly recent historical events as inspiration. In a 2016 interview, Adams said: "I'm sometimes asked if I'm a political composer. It's the wrong question. The word 'politics' comes from the Greek *politikos*, which simply means 'people.' Atomic bombs, terrorism—these are events that are present in the psyche of every individual. [The operas] are a modern way of exploring the mythology of our time."

Harmonielehre's emphasis on archetypes from dreams and legends hints at an early

version of Adams' vision of modern mythology. In addition to the explicit references to Anfortas and dreams, a modern historical figure who seems almost mythological—to Adams, at least—also exerts a force on the piece: the looming presence of Schoenberg. From the title to the stylistic rejection of the 12-tone method, *Harmonielehre* abounds in complex yet reverential tributes to the composer who plagued Adams' creative identity. While Adams' dream about Schoenberg involved the abduction of his child (the future Quackie?), his real-life fear had to do with Schoenberg's effect on his musical progeny. *Harmonielehre*, in response to this fear, is the triumphant answer.

Bassoonist Cornelia Sommer received her Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Juilliard in May 2022.

About the Artists



David Robertson

David Robertson—conductor, artist, composer, thinker, American musical visionary—occupies the most prominent podiums in opera, orchestral, and new music. He is a champion of contemporary composers and an ingenious and adventurous programmer. Robertson has served in numerous artistic leadership positions, such as chief conductor and artistic director of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, a transformative 13-year tenure as music director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, and with the Orchestre National de Lyon, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and, as protégé of Pierre Boulez, Ensemble InterContemporain. Robertson appears with the world's great orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Vienna Philharmonic, and many major ensembles and festivals on five continents. Since his 1996 Metropolitan Opera debut, Robertson has conducted a breathtaking range of Met projects, including the 2019-20 season opening premiere production of *Porgy and Bess*, for which he shared a Grammy Award, for best opera recording, in 2021. Last year, he conducted the Met's *Porgy* revival in addition to making his Rome Opera debut conducting Janáček's *Káťa Kabanová*. Robertson is a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France and is the recipient of numerous artistic awards. He serves on the Tianjin Juilliard Advisory Council, complementing his role as Juilliard's director of conducting studies, distinguished visiting faculty.

Juilliard Orchestra

Juilliard's largest and most visible student performing ensemble, the Juilliard Orchestra is known for delivering polished and passionate performances of works spanning the repertoire. Comprising more than 375 students in the bachelor's and master's degree programs, the orchestra appears throughout the season in concerts on the stages of Juilliard's Peter Jay Sharp Theater, Alice Tully Hall, and Carnegie Hall. The orchestra is a strong partner to Juilliard's other divisions, appearing in opera, dance, and drama productions as well as presenting an annual concert of world premieres by Juilliard student composers. This season, an impressive roster of world-renowned conductors leads the Juilliard Orchestra, including Giancarlo Guerrero, Manfred Honeck, Speranza Scappucci, Bertrand de Billy, Roderick Cox, Carlos Miguel Prieto, Simone Young, and Daniela Candillari as well as faculty conductors David Robertson, director of conducting studies and distinguished visiting faculty, and Jeffrey Milarsky. Among the virtual projects students from the orchestra participated in during the 2020 lockdown was *Bolero Juilliard*, which became a viral sensation. The Juilliard Orchestra has toured across the U.S. and throughout Europe, South America, and Asia, where it was the first Western conservatory ensemble allowed to visit and perform following the opening of the People's Republic of China in 1987, returning two decades later, in 2008. In summer 2019, the orchestra traveled to London, performing alongside the Royal Academy of Music in Royal Albert Hall at the BBC Proms. Other ensembles under the Juilliard Orchestra umbrella include the conductorless Juilliard Chamber Orchestra, Wind Orchestra, Lab Orchestra, and contemporary music group AXIOM.

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