

R E N D E R

APRIL 20, 2024
THE ANNEX

BRAD WELLS RENDER

JOELYSA PANKANEA The Fifth Stage
I. DENIAL | II. ANGER | III. DEPRESSION
IV. BARGAINING | V. ACCEPTANCE

JOELYSA PANKANEA The First Stage
I. WONDER | II. INNOCENCE | III. TRAUMA
IV. SHOCK | V. RELEASE

ALEX VOLLANT Nukum

REENA ESMAIL She Will Transform You

VIET CUONG Still So Much To Say

ANDREW BALFOUR Omaa Biindig

MUSICA INTIMA PERFORMS AND OPERATES ON THE STOLEN
TERRITORY OF THE COAST SALISH PEOPLES, INCLUDING
THE TERRITORIES OF THE $x^w m\theta\theta k^w \acute{a}y\acute{a}m$ (MUSQUEAM),
 $s\acute{k}w\acute{x}w\acute{u}7mesh \acute{u}xwumixw$ (SQUAMISH),
AND $s\acute{a}lil\acute{w}ata\text{?}d$ (TSLEIL-WAUTUTH) NATIONS.

musica intima

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In the moment of transition between life and death, only one thing changes: you lose the momentum of the biochemical cycles that keep the machinery running. In the moment before death, you are still composed of the same thousand trillion trillion atoms as in the moment after death - the only difference is that their neighborly network of social interactions has ground to a halt.

At that moment, the atoms begin to drift apart, no longer enslaved to the goals of keeping up a human form. The interacting pieces that once constructed your body begin to unravel like a sweater, each thread spiraling off in a different direction. Following your last breath, those thousand trillion trillion atoms begin to blend into the earth around you. As you degrade, your atoms become incorporated into new constellations: the leaf of a staghorn fern, a speckled snail shell, a kernel of maize, a beetle's mandible, a waxen bloodroot, a ptarmigan's tail feather.

Once every few millennia, all your atoms pull together again, traveling from around the globe, like the leaders of nations uniting for a summit, converging for their densest reunion in the form of a human. They are driven by nostalgia to regroup into the tight pinpoint geometry in which they began. In this form they can relish a forgotten sense of holiday-like intimacy. They come together to search for something they once knew, but didn't appreciate at the time...

from "Search" by David Eagleman (*Sum*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2009)

Render

Brad Wells

Written in late summer in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, 'Render' (2013) is a song inspired by David Eagleman's short story 'Search'. The story describes a vision of the afterlife as the periodic unraveling of our material, molecular selves into other forms in nature, occasional re-gatherings of our disparate molecules over millennia and the complete continuity and maintenance - in spite of the unraveling - of our consciousness and feeling. (BW)

The Fifth Stage

The First Stage

Joelysa Pankanea

Both commissioned by Little Chamber Music, Pankanea's two "stages" make up a pair of requiems written on the death of her parents. "The Fifth Stage" was originally written in 2015 for soprano and instrumental ensemble, and a new arrangement for *musica intima* is being premiered this evening. "The First Stage" was written for *musica intima* in 2018. This is the first performance of the two pieces beside one another. The titles refer to the stages of grief Pankanea experienced as she was writing - she wrote "The Fifth Stage" many years after her father's death, while "The First Stage" was written very shortly after her mother passed away.

"The Fifth Stage" is entirely textless, and the five movements follow a very linear idea of the five stages of grieving: denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and ultimately, acceptance. Tentative long phrases give way to aggressive and percussive chords, before rich harmonies construct a fantasy of existence - which slowly unravels into the third movement, "Depression." Here we experience Pankanea's father's theme for the first time, played by the alto flute. The theme is passed around throughout the movement before the rocking motion of "Bargaining" takes over - and this lilting motion eventually soothes us into the gentle groove of "Acceptance." In the end, the flute fragments the father's theme, before a final prayer bell echos the opening bell - reminding us that life is only a series of transient moments.

Similarly, "The First Stage" is mostly textless, but much less linear. "Wonder" opens with a sung fragment: Pankanea describes the opening as "the riff that Indian women sing over and over to their babies to put them to sleep." The marimba gives us a steady heartbeat, before moving into the second movement - an exploration of "Innocence" which opens with a quote from 'Que sera, sera.' Doris Day gives way to a cinematic fantasy of children playing, which

winds down slowly, leading us into “Trauma”, a movement still based on the opening riff, but transforming it to a darker space. “Shock” opens with spoken word - recounting Joelysa’s conversation with her mother - before a brief Rumi text is set homophonically. Finally, “Release”, the only a cappella movement in both works, marries the father’s theme from “The Fifth Stage” with the riff present throughout “The First Stage” - releasing a series of emotions from both pieces into the world.

“The conversation came up a few months after my mum had passed. At that point, I basically didn’t even know my name. I was completely distraught, I thought “that’s insane” - and at some point I realized, “When do you get an opportunity to write something from such a place of raw sadness, loss?” And so I said yes and went into the writing of it, and it’s the first piece in twenty years of being a composer where I felt like I almost had no direction. I was flip-flopping through all the stages of grief...and trying to adjust to a life when I’d lost my last parent - and it was brutal. I think that at the time I was very worried that it was going to sound like a hot mess. Hearing it again after three and a half years is quite amazing, because something came out of that which is very much my mother.” (Joelysa Pankanea, on “The First Stage”)

II. Innocence LIVINGSTON/EVANS

*When I was just a little girl,
I asked my mother, “What will I be?
Will I be pretty, will I be rich?”
Here’s what she said to me:
Que sera, sera,
Whatever will be, will be.
The future’s not ours to see...*

IV. Shock RUMI

*When you see my corpse is being carried, don’t cry for my leaving. I’m not leaving, I’m arriving at eternal love.
When you leave me in the grave don’t say goodbye,
remember a grave is only a curtain for the paradise behind.
When, for the last time, you close your mouth, your words
and soul will belong to the world of no place, no time.*

Nukum

Alex Vollant

The word “Nukum” designates a grandmother in the Innu language. This piece is a dedication to their wisdom, patience, resilience and courage. Both the words and music were written by the composer who gifted this most personal piece to musica intima. It speaks of the special relationships that we can find in many First Nations families and communities between children and their grandmothers. The elders share to their offspring their knowledge about the land, the language, the culture, and much more, while the young ones drink their words while waiting to access all of their secrets. (AV)

Nukum

tshipatshi a itapishtin uenapissish?

tshetshi tipatshimushtuin

ueshkat ka aussiuin

tan itenitakanipan nutshimit

anu mishapan

Grand-mother

Can I lay down next to you for a while?

Can you tell me about life

When you were young

When our land was bigger

She Will Transform You

Reena Esmail / Neelanjana Banerjee

“She Will Transform You” is centered around a beautiful poem of Indian-American author Neelanjana Banerjee. She speaks about the beautiful relationship of an immigrant and her child to their country of origin, and the significant role a child from both cultures has in bridging the divide between them. As a child of immigrants, I have felt both that distance – of being the ‘other’ in both America and India – and also the resonance of being at home wherever I am.

The piece moves in and out of a Hindustani raga called Rageshree — which has such a lush resonance about it, and is also harmonically grounded in an unusual way (with the 4th instead of the more common 5th, which makes our ear feel like it’s never quite ‘home’) – so it has both a sense of belonging and distance. It’s those two feelings – of belonging and distance – and the journey between them, that I wanted to explore in this work. (RE)

Homeland: why do you elude me, tease me?
There, my ancestors don’t know me.
Here my neighbors say ‘go back home’ to me.

When will you let me name you, claim you?

But now, it is no longer about me—
for this newborn child, I have a plea:
Homeland, let this sweet child be,

never torture her like you’ve done [to] me.
Let her always find her way—surface streets and highways,
underpasses and bikepaths, and she will transform you

from concept to community, from skid row to safe haven.
With each milestone, let her dismantle your distance,
until one day, she arrives here
—palm tree shadow, desert dust in her eyes—
and smiles, and knows, she’s home.

Still So Much To Say

Viet Cuong / David Ferry

This piece sets a fragment from the final stanza of “Resemblance” by David Ferry:

Virgil said, when Eurydice died again,
“*There was still so much to say*” that had not been said
Even before her first death, from which he had vainly
Attempted, with his singing, to rescue her.

(VC)

Omaa Biindig

Andrew Balfour

Omaa Biindig describes the directions; not just the cardinal directions of North, South, East, and West which we often remember, but also the water and the earth around us, as well as the most important - here, inside ourselves. We sing it again and again, as we all remember to take care of ourselves in the face of grief, stress, and chaos; Andrew’s beautiful writing continually bringing us the light of new days, new joys, and new possibilities.

Nibi	<i>Water</i>
Ningaabii’anong	<i>The West</i>
Giiwedinaong	<i>The North</i>
Waabanong	<i>The East</i>
Zhaawanong	<i>The South</i>
Aki	<i>Earth</i>
Omaa biindig	<i>Here, inside.</i>

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Music can create incredible experiences, and musica intima exists to create these moments - to foster human connection through the power of vocal music.

Your support of the ensemble's performance, outreach and community building is crucial.

musica intima is unique in many ways, but like all non-profit arts organizations, we are facing new and more severe fiscal challenges - we are not immune to inflation, and there are no more COVID-related financial supports from government granting agencies, despite rising expenses, and revenues that still remain far below pre-pandemic levels. We love to make music, and the best part of that is sharing it with you - online, on a CD, or at a concert - but the fiscal realities of our little society are making that harder and

We are a small organization - your dollars go far! Part of what makes us unique in the Canadian choral landscape, and especially here at home is that we don't have corporate sponsors, and our grant funding is a fraction of what many performers or presenters receive. Despite this, we continue to produce ground-breaking art at home and across the country, with 85% of our budget devoted to the expenses of making music (the average among choral organizations in Canada being 64%). In this new reality, however, some of these groundbreaking projects are in jeopardy.

You know how special musica intima is - there is no other professional ensemble in Canada that is created for the artists, by the artists - and you know how special the shared connection is when you join us for our performances. Help us continue to share that here, across the province, and across Turtle Island.

Your financial gifts sustain us, and without your support, we cannot continue sharing the music that comforts, excites, and challenges you.

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