

# Harmonia Chamber Players II

Saturday, November 22, 2025 • 2:00 p.m.

University Unitarian Church



AARON KEYT (\*1964)

Eight Songs on Poems by Emily Dickinson — WORLD PREMIERE

Out of the Morning  
The Robin  
May-Flower  
The Rat  
To Make a Prairie  
The Spider  
Nature Rarer Uses Yellow  
The Moon

**Karen Dunstan**, soprano • **Jennifer Chung**, piano

CAROL SAMS (\*1945)

Six Poems of Carl Sandburg

Prayers of Steel  
Maroon with Silver Frost  
Sea-Wash  
Phizzog  
Old Music for Quiet Hearts  
Happiness

**Cassandra Willock**, soprano • **Anjali Chudasama**, mezzo-soprano  
**Lyon Stewart**, tenor • **Gabriel Salmon**, baritone

— intermission —

HUNTLEY BEYER (\*1947)

String Quartet No. 2 ("Riddles") — WORLD PREMIERE

Scat cats  
Over easy  
Shadow waltz  
Laughing mischief

**Stephen Provine**, violin • **Fritz Klein**, violin  
**Katherine McWilliams**, viola • **Matthew Wyant**, cello

---

## Harmonia Orchestra and Chorus

William White, music director • George Shangrow, founder

1916 Pike Pl. Ste 12 #112, Seattle WA 98101 • 206-682-5208 • [www.harmoniaseattle.org](http://www.harmoniaseattle.org)

## Program Notes

### Aaron Keyt

#### **Eight Songs on Poems by Emily Dickinson**

*Keyt was born November 15, 1964, in Seattle. This set of songs for voice and piano, which receives its first performance this afternoon, was composed in 2020.*

Aaron Keyt is a Pacific Northwest composer based in Seattle. He has written numerous works for voice, piano, organ, chamber ensembles, choir, orchestra and band. Since 2018 (William White's first season as Harmonia's music director), he has performed in the Harmonia Chorus as a member of the tenor section. In March of this year, Harmonia presented the world premiere of Keyt's *Nizina* for two cellos and chorus, with a text by his spouse, Jennifer Chung (who, in addition to playing piano, also sings alto in the Harmonia Chorus).

Last year, Keyt (singing) and Chung (on piano) premiered the first seven of their *Koi Songs* for voice and piano, for which Keyt first wrote the music and Chung then wrote the words (in the manner of the Gershwins). The couple enjoy playing piano duets, and Keyt has so far written two sets of these pieces for them to play together at home (and for Chung to play with better pianists than Keyt in public).

Keyt began composing when he was nine years old, and four years later entered the composition program at the University of Washington School of Music, where he also studied trombone. He continued his composition studies in the graduate program at Princeton University. Also an active improviser, he is a founding member of Banned Rehearsal, a Seattle ensemble that has been making music since 1984.

"One of Harmonia's activities during the COVID months of 2020 was online music trivia, hosted by Will White," writes Keyt. "One result of those contests was a set of piano duets called *Monsters*, inspired by a Halloween-themed question. The Dickinson songs also had their initial inspiration in one of Will's trivia questions, the answer to which involved whole-tone scales, which feature prominently in the set. The chosen poems all involve animals or nature. In retrospect, the preference for these over any of Dickinson's more introspective poems probably reflects the claustrophobia of the time. The choice of mostly humorous and happy texts was very definitely based on a desire to brighten the then-prevailing mood. The songs are dedicated to my first voice teacher, Rose Betz-Zall."

### Carol Sams

#### **Six Poems of Carl Sandburg**

*Sams was born November 25, 1945, in Sacramento, California. She composed this work in January and February of 1989, dedicating it to George Shangrow, who conducted the George Shangrow Chorale in the premiere on May 22, 1989, at University Unitarian Church.*

Carol Sams began composing when she was a young child, writing some four-part hymns at age six, "just from going to church and listening and taking piano lessons." In

high school she sang in the chorus and in 1959 became so entranced with the movie version of *Porgy and Bess* that she decided to write an opera of her own. (Another followed, although they were never performed.)

At Sacramento State College, where she went to study mathematics, Sams first became acquainted with music theory. "I fell in love with theory: all those things inside music that I knew existed had *names* all of a sudden. So after three years, convinced that math was not my field, I transferred to the University of California at Santa Barbara, got a degree in music, went up to Mills College in Oakland to study with Darius Milhaud, got another degree, came to the University of Washington because I thought it was a small school (which of course it wasn't) and because I wanted to study with a particular teacher (who I found out wasn't there any more because they had fired him), stayed anyway, and got *another* degree" (the first-ever doctorate in composition awarded to a woman by the UW).

Shortly after arriving in Seattle, Sams made the acquaintance of a young George Shangrow (founder of the group now known as Harmonia). She and her husband, Jerry, joined Shangrow's nascent Seattle Chamber Singers, with whom they sang soprano and tenor solos, respectively, in dozens of Bach cantatas and other works over the ensuing decades. Along with Huntley Beyer and Robert Kechley, Carol Sams became part of a celebrated "triumvirate" of Seattle composers who would eventually write dozens of works premiered by the organization. ("They write music that people enjoy listening to—a hallmark in modern music," Shangrow would wryly remark.) At first these were short choral works or pieces for chamber orchestra, but before long came symphonies, operas and large-scale oratorios—among them Sams' magnificent *The Earthmakers* (1987), performed by Harmonia no fewer than four times.

Sams' Sandburg songs date from 1989 and "were written for George and George's group," the George Shangrow Chorale, "and they did them very well," she says today. Originally scored for a small choral ensemble (the George Shangrow Chorale was a 22-voice offshoot of the Seattle Chamber Singers that gave its first performance in January 1989), Sams recently reworked two of the six movements to be sung by the vocal quartet heard this afternoon (in the very same space where the work was premiered 36 years ago). "I also added some key signatures, although I don't know if that will help or hurt!"

Each song "has a different emotional flavor," says the composer. The opening number, "Prayers of Steel," which has been performed separately, exudes "a strong sense of what the connection to God is. It has a sense of skyscrapers to it—made out of steel." The next poem, "Maroon with Silver Frost," has an "observational quality, with a sense of vulnerability in it.

"The preludes and fugues in 'Phizzog' represent an impetuous and teasing kind of thing that kids might say to each other," while "Old Music for Quiet Hearts" is "my favorite of the bunch, because I tried to do some visual characterizations of leaves falling over a pond. It feels really

close to me even still. After rehearsing the other ones" in preparation for today's performance, "I feel pretty close to them, too, actually."

### Huntley Beyer

#### String Quartet No. 2 ("Riddles")

*William Huntley Beyer was born November 17, 1947, growing up in New Jersey; he currently resides in Redmond. His second string quartet receives its world premiere this afternoon.*

Huntley Beyer met George Shangrow in 1969 in the classroom of harpsichordist Sylvia Kind at the University of Washington, where Beyer had come to pursue a graduate degree in composition. George played harpsichord and Huntley played both oboe and recorder. A friendship quickly developed and they began performing sonatas and trio sonatas together. Both enjoyed improvising, and would often crack each other up with "improvisational challenges" that involved ever-more-absurd levels of ornamentation.

Beyer began performing with Shangrow's Seattle Chamber Singers not long after the group's first official concert in June 1969, playing oboe and writing *a cappella* pieces for the ensemble. When George formed an orchestra — originally called the Broadway Chamber Symphony (named after the performance hall where they first gave concerts) and later known as the Broadway Symphony and then Orchestra Seattle — in 1979, Huntley became a founding member, playing oboe for about 15 years while continuing to perform chamber music with George.

Over the decades, Shangrow and his ensembles premiered numerous Beyer compositions, including three of his four symphonies, a flute concerto (*Toot Sweet*), the powerful *St. Mark Passion* and a song cycle (*The Turns of a Girl*), along with various choral-orchestral works: *Songs of Illumination*, *Mass of Life and Death* and *Requiem for the Children*. Members of Harmonia premiered his wind quintet in 2011, a piano trio in 2016, and a brass quintet in 2019. William White has conducted Harmonia in premieres of Beyer's most recent choral-orchestral works: *Circumference* (2019) and *World Out of Balance* (2022).

Beyer's String Quartet No. 1 ("Rusty Times") was written for the now-world-famous Kronos Quartet, which gave

some of its first performances on concerts presented by the Seattle Chamber Singers. ("George was music director at the University Unitarian Church and helped organize our first concert series as a group," recalled Kronos founder David Harrington in 2010. "Kronos played [George Crumb's] *Black Angels* for the first time . . . on this series.") Beyer also composed a short encore piece for Kronos, *Enantiodromia High*, recorded in 1979 (*Fanfare* called that album, released in 1982, "one of the finest string quartet discs ever issued").

"I composed *Riddles* for the four fine string players performing today," writes the composer of his newest composition, "whom I have known for a very long time, ever since my days as an oboist and composer in the Broadway Symphony and Orchestra Seattle. So first, a big thank you to such wonderful players and their willingness to play a new piece of mine.

"I call the piece *Riddles* because the movement content and titles suggest a putting-together of moods and ideas that might not typically go together, which is what music is all about, right? A unity of diversity. The title of the first movement, 'Scat cats,' might make no sense, until you decode 'cats' in the Bohemian sense, in which case cool cats doing a little jazz scatting makes perfect sense. Ask Jack Kerouac. This is also personal for me, because often in life, for example when simply strolling along, I'll improvise a little nonsense-syllable scatting. This is very much like the main theme of the first movement. The slower themes, in contrast, are lyrical.

"The second movement, 'Over easy,' is how I like my eggs. But eggs are not a useful image for music, so imagine yourself just trundling on down and over a quiet road, in an easy way, a jaunty way, no hurry, nowhere to go, just being happy for no reason.

"The third movement, 'Shadow waltz,' combines the gentle, gracious sense of a waltz with a sense of yearning, or nostalgia. There's a darker undertone to the lightness of the waltz. It's a waltz with a shadow side.

"This contrast of light and dark carries into the last movement, 'Laughing mischief,' which features a bluesy grit that morphs into playful, fast figures, full of fun. So it's a kind of bluesy scherzo."

## Song Texts

### Out of the Morning

Will there really be a morning?  
Is there such a thing as day?  
Could I see it from the mountains  
If I were as tall as they?  
Has it feet like water-lilies?  
Has it feathers like a bird?  
Is it brought from famous countries  
Of which I have never heard?  
Oh, some scholar! Oh, some sailor!  
Oh, some wise man from the skies!  
Please to tell a little pilgrim  
Where the place called morning lies!

### The Robin

The robin is the one  
That interrupts the morn  
With hurried, few, express reports  
When March is scarcely on.  
The robin is the one  
That overflows the noon  
With her cherubic quantity,  
An April but begun.  
The robin is the one  
That speechless from her nest  
Submits that home and certainty  
And sanctity are best.

### May-Flower

Pink, small, and punctual,  
Aromatic, low,  
Covert in April,  
Candid in May,  
Dear to the moss,  
Known by the knoll,  
Next to the robin  
In every human soul.  
Bold little beauty,  
Bedecked with thee,  
Nature forswears  
Antiquity.

*Please turn page quietly . . .*

### **The Rat**

The rat is the concisest tenant.  
He pays no rent,—  
Repudiates the obligation,  
On schemes intent.

Balking our wit  
To sound or circumvent,  
Hate cannot harm  
A foe so reticent.

Neither decree  
Prohibits him,  
Lawful as  
Equilibrium.

### **To Make a Prairie**

To make a prairie it takes a clover  
and one bee,  
One clover, and a bee.  
And revery.  
The revery alone will do,  
If bees are few.

### **The Spider**

A spider sewed at night  
Without a light  
Upon an arc of white.  
If ruff it was of dame  
Or shroud of gnome,  
Himself, himself inform.  
Of immortality  
His strategy  
Was physiognomy.

### **Nature Rarer Uses Yellow**

Nature rarer uses yellow  
Than another hue;  
Saves she all of that for sunsets,—  
Prodigal of blue,  
Spending scarlet like a woman,  
Yellow she affords  
Only scantily and selectly,  
Like a lover's words.

### **The Moon**

The moon was but a chin of gold  
A night or two ago,  
And now she turns her perfect face  
Upon the world below.  
Her forehead is of amplest blond;  
Her cheek like beryl stone;  
Her eye unto the summer dew  
The likeliest I have known.

Her lips of amber never part;  
But what must be the smile  
Upon her friend she could bestow  
Were such her silver will!

And what a privilege to be  
But the remotest star!  
For certainly her way might pass  
Beside your twinkling door.

Her bonnet is the firmament,  
The universe her shoe,  
The stars the trinkets at her belt,  
Her dainties of blue.

— Emily Dickinson

### **Prayers of Steel**

Lay me on an anvil, O god.  
Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.  
Let me pry loose old walls.  
Let me lift and loosen old foundations.  
Lay me on an anvil, O God.  
Beat me and hammer into a steel spike.  
Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.  
Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.  
Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into white stars.

### **Maroon with Silver Frost**

Whispers of Maroon came on the little river.  
The slashed hill took up the sunset,  
Took up the evening star.  
The brambles cracked in a fire call  
To the beginnings of frost.  
"It is almost night," the maroon whispered  
in widening blood rings on the little river.  
"It is night," the sunset, the evening star  
said later over the hump of the slashed hill.  
"What if it is?" the brambles crackled across  
the sure silver beginnings of frost.

### **Sea-Wash**

The sea-wash never ends.  
The sea-wash repeats, repeats.  
Only old songs? Is that all the sea knows?  
Only the old strong songs?  
Is that all?  
The sea-wash repeats, repeats.

### **Phizzog**

This face you got,  
This here phizzog you carry around,  
You never picked it out for yourself,  
at all, at all — did you?  
This here phizzog — somebody handed it  
to you — am I right?  
Somebody said, "Here's yours, now go see  
what you can do with it."  
Somebody slipped it to you and it was like  
a package marked:  
"No goods exchanged after being taken away"—  
This face you got.

### **Happiness**

I asked professors who teach the meaning of life to tell me what is happiness.  
And I went to famous executives who boss the work of thousands of men.  
They all shook their heads and gave me a smile as though I was trying to fool with them.  
And then one Sunday afternoon I wandered out along the Desplaines River  
And I saw a crowd of Hungarians under the trees with their women and their children  
and a keg of beer and an accordion.

— Carl Sandburg

"Old Music for Quiet Hearts" from *Honey and Salt* ©1963 by Carl Sandburg. Reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. All other poems now in the public domain.

### **Old Music for Quiet Hearts**

Be still as before oh pool  
Be blue and still oh pool  
As before blue as before still  
Oh pool of the many communions  
A wingprint may come  
Flash over and be gone  
A yellow leaf may fall  
May sink and join  
Companion fallen leaves  
The print of blue sky  
The night bowl of stars  
These far off pass and bypass  
Over you blue over you still  
Oh pool of the many communions  
Now hold your quiet glass oh pool  
Now keep your mirrorlight blue  
They come and they go  
And one and all  
You know them one and all  
And they know not you  
Nor you nor your mirrorlight blue  
Only old music for quiet hearts.