



THE CROSSING @ CHRISTMAS

WORLD PREMIERE | PHILADELPHIA PREMIERE

THE CROSSING Walter Aldrich, Isobel Anthony, Katy Avery, Kelly Ann Bixby, Karen Blanchard, Steven Bradshaw, Matt Cramer, Micah Dinger, Ryan Fleming, Joanna Gates, Steven Hyder, Michael Jones, Lauren Kelly, Anika Kildegaard, Heidi Kurtz, Maren Montalbano, Daniel O'Dea, Daniel Schwartz, Thann Scoggin, Rebecca Siler, Tiana Sorenson, Daniel Spratlan, Elisa Sutherland, Daniel Taylor

CONDUCTOR Donald Nally

ORGAN Scott Dettra

ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR Kevin Vondrak

KEYBOARDIST John Grecia

GUEST KEYBOARDISTS John Conahan, John Walthausen

SOUND DESIGNER Paul Vazquez

FRIDAY, **DECEMBER 16** @ 7 PM

The Church of the Holy Trinity

There will be no intermission.

PROGRAM

make peace (2016, A Jeff Quartet) David Lang

Mass Transmission (2012) Mason Bates

- I. The Dutch Telegraph Office
- II. Java
- III. Wireless Connections

Ochre (2022) (East Coast Premiere) Caroline Shaw

Commissioned by the Ann Stookey Fund for New Music for The Crossing and Donald Nally, Cantori New York, and Volti (San Francisco).

- I. Siderite
- II. Limonite
- III. Maghemite
- IV. Magnetite
- V. Hematite
- VI. Vivianite
- VII. Goethite

sleepers prayer (2016) David Lang

PROGRAM NOTES

The Crossing reunites with Caroline Shaw for a new, substantial work inspired by the writings of Robin Wall Kimmerer and Kem Luther, focused on that self-cultivating friend to the earth's surface, moss: its intricate communities, at times resembling ours, offering much for us to learn. Mason Bates' *Mass Transmission*, for choir with organ and electronics, explores how the advent of radio technology brought us closer yet magnified our distances and loneliness, drawing on radio-wave communications in the 1920s between parents in the Netherlands and their children on Java, sent there to work for the Dutch government. Colorful, innovative, original and heart-wrenching.

Caroline Shaw's new work is commissioned for The Crossing, Cantori New York, Notre Dame Vocale and Volti with funding provided by the Ann Stookey Fund for New Music.

PROGRAM NOTE FROM DONALD NALLY

I remember the first time I encountered Percy Shelley's "Ozymandias," with its chilling reference to the ephemerality of civilizations.

*Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

What remains on those sands is art:
a toppled statue,
and the following words,
communicating with us over great spans of time and geography:

*My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!*

Back then, I didn't fully understand the raw truth of this poem.
Civilizations decay and vanish, leaving future cultures to speculate on them by what's left:
Scattered fragments of art and architecture, communicating over vast distances of time.

Caroline Shaw's *Ochre* feels like one such communication. Fragments of poetry of the 16th and 19th century emerge and recede absent of their contexts, as if only partially visible – etchings in a broken piece of marble, the rest lost. We understand the words, but not their full meanings. We can deduce that words are missing:

Contemplate all this work of Time;

...
As dying Nature's earth and lime,

Within oneself from more to more,

...
Life is not as idle ore,

We sense that *Ochre* is an elegy from an imperiled civilization, told mostly through sounds and colors; there is mystery in the absence of text, and in the words we sense are absent. We can piece together a story of "humans walking upon the earth." In Caroline's words, *Ochre* "is about soil... how we consider and care for the ground beneath our feet – our Earth, ourselves, our histories, our sense of the scale of our lives in the context of geological history" with text communicating a "subtle hint at the sense of regret about the state of climate policy over the last century in the U.S."

*A thousand regrets at deserting you
And leaving behind...
That it seems soon my days will dwindle away.*

Communication across great distances is also at the heart of Mason Bates' *Mass Transmission*. Transcripts and records of our first wireless communications:
a Dutch child leaves her mother to serve as a page in the colony of Java;
their only means of communication is to be found at the Dutch Telegraph Office.

*The voice from the East.
Nothing is farther apart than the two straits that separate us.
In this way the world grows closer and closer, even as we move further apart.*

These records of those strained communications are like fossils, telling the tale of inventions that are, today, omnipresent. They are in our pockets, how we explore space, how we bought the ticket to this concert, how we paid for parking.

*Holland and Java lie in the deepest part of a mother's heart,
and in every sigh is a wireless signal: Hello, oh, my child...*

What does any of this have to do with Christmas?

Holiday music is available to us at every turn; on every device; in every store, street, parking lot; in churches and schools. The world doesn't need us to sing that.

Instead, we sing about our relationships, trying to explore themes - not of birth and rebirth - but of you and me: family to family, nation to nation, human to Earth. Christmas. *Life is not as idle ore.*

In our 'absence of idleness,' we seek peace in those relationships. Peace, the backstory of every civilization, the story of the holiday for which our concert is named.

We find that story, our story, in the works of David Lang that open and close our concert. David, whose new work *poor hymnal* will premiere at next December's The Crossing @ Christmas, has a way of distilling text to the bare essence of our thoughts.

Our concert closes with these thoughts:

*let me lie down in peace
let me rise up again in peace*

...and opens even more simply, communicating as directly as we are able, with our wish:

*if you can make peace
make peace*

*The lone and level sands stretch far away.
We can do so much more than despair.
We can sing.*

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The Crossing

The Crossing is a Grammy® Award-winning professional chamber choir conducted by Donald Nally and dedicated to new music. It is committed to working with creative teams to make and record new, substantial works for choir that explore and expand ways of writing for choir, singing in choir and listening to music for choir. Many of its nearly 125 commissioned premieres address social, environmental and political issues.

The Crossing collaborates with some of the world's most accomplished ensembles and artists, including the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, Lyric Fest, Piffaro, Beth Morrison Projects, Allora & Calzadilla, Bang on a Can, Klockriketeatern and the International Contemporary Ensemble. Similarly, The Crossing often collaborates with some of world's most prestigious venues and presenters, such as the Park Avenue Armory, Penn Live Arts at the University of Pennsylvania, National Sawdust, David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center, Disney Hall in Los Angeles, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Menil Collection in Houston, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, Haarlem Choral Biennale in The Netherlands, The Finnish National Opera in Helsinki, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, Symphony Space in New York, Winter Garden with WNYC and Duke, Northwestern, Colgate and

Notre Dame Universities. The Crossing holds an annual residency at the Warren Miller Performing Arts Center in Big Sky, Montana.

With a commitment to recording its commissions, The Crossing has released 26 albums, receiving two Grammy® Awards for Best Choral Performance (2018, 2019) and seven Grammy® nominations. The Crossing, with Donald Nally, was the American Composers Forum's 2017 Champion of New Music. They were the recipients of the 2015 Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence, three ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming and the Dale Warland Singers Commission Award from Chorus America.

Recently, The Crossing has expanded its choral presentation to film, working with Four/Ten Media, in-house sound designer Paul Vazquez of Digital Mission Audio Services, visual artists Brett Snodgrass, Eric Southern and Steven Bradshaw and composers David Lang, Paul Fowler and Michael Gordon on live and animated versions of new and existing works. Lang's *protect yourself from infection* and *in nature* were specifically designed to be performed within the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which The Crossing premiered a number of newly commissioned works for outdoors by Matana Roberts, Wang Lu and Ayanna Woods. crossingchoir.org #ComeHearNow

Donald Nally (Conductor)

Nally conducts The Crossing, the internationally acclaimed, Grammy® Award-winning professional choir that commissions, premieres and records only new music. He holds the John W. Beattie Chair of Music at Northwestern University where he is professor and director of choral organizations. Nally has served as chorus master at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Welsh National Opera, Opera Philadelphia and for many seasons at the Spoleto Festival in Italy. Nally has commissioned over 140 works. He received the 2017 Michael Korn Founders Award from Chorus America; his ensembles have twice received the Margaret Hillis Award for Excellence in Choral Music. Nally has worked closely with the artists Allora & Calzadilla and composer David Lang on projects in London, Osaka, Cleveland, Edmonton, Cordoba and Philadelphia. Recent highlights include his role as visiting resident artist at the Park Avenue Armory, music director for the world premiere of Lang's *the mile-long opera* – directing 1,000 voices on the High Line in Manhattan, chorus master for the New York Philharmonic for world premieres by Lang and Julia Wolfe and guest conducting works he has commissioned with the Swedish Radio Choir.

Scott Dettra (Organ)

Praised as a "brilliant organist" (*Dallas Morning News*) and an "outstanding musician" (*The Diapason*), and described as a "prodigy" by *The New York Times* at age 13, Dettra is acclaimed as one of America's leading concert organists. Dettra's playing is praised for its clarity, rhythmic intensity and musical elegance and has been described by *The American Organist* as "music making of absolute authority and sophisticated expression." He combines an active performance schedule with his post as Director of Music at the Church of the Incarnation in Dallas, where he leads a vibrant music ministry in one of the country's largest Episcopal parishes. In addition to his work at Incarnation, he is a member of the organ faculty at Southern Methodist University and is organist of The Crossing, the Grammy® Award-winning professional chamber choir based in Philadelphia. Prior to his appointment in Dallas, he was organist of Washington National Cathedral.

PROGRAM TEXTS

make peace

Words and music by David Lang (after the mourner's kaddish)

make peace is a Jeff Quartet, The Crossing's 2016 commissioning project: fifteen composers who knew and worked with co-founder Jeff Dinsmore wrote quartets in his memory. The commissioning of *make peace* was supported by The Ann Stookey Fund for New Music.

From the Composer:

The text for *make peace* is a rewriting of the last section of the Kaddish, the prayer that Jews say in memory of the dead.

if you can make peace
make peace
in the heavens
in us
in all the world
make peace

Mass Transmission

Music by Mason Bates / words from various sources

From the Composer:

Mass Transmission tells the true story of a distantly separated family communicating over the earliest radio transmissions. It's 1920's-era Skype: on one end of the line is a Dutch girl sent to be a page in the colonial government of the East Indies; on the other end is her mother, thousands of miles away in the Dutch Telegraph Office. The piece explores the warmth of human emotions pulsing through a mechanistic medium.

Two obscure texts are set to music. The texts for outer movements are adapted from an obscure 1928 government publication about the technological advances made by the Dutch in communicating with their colonists, compiling transcripts of these ground-breaking communications, and giving us the mother's perspective. The central movement gives us the daughter's perspective of jungle-life in Java, drawn from the diary of Elizabeth van Kampen about growing up there.

The chorus sing these texts, comprising the 'animal warmth' of the piece, while the electronics give us a 'musical scrim' of static and short-wave radio sounds. The organ connects the two: sometimes it supports the chorus, sometimes it plays the toccata-like music of the Dutch Telegraph Office.

I. The Dutch Telegraph Office

The miracle still lies in my memories like a dream.

Slowly layers of mystery unveil. Gradually my eyes alight as if recovering from a dream.

A bit fearfully, I speak into the microphone:

"Hello? Hello? Are you there, my child?"

12000 Kilometers, not a single wire. The air is what transmits the message. A miracle.

My voice travels to the Indies, which took my daughter weeks to reach on a steamboat.

Days and

nights, the endless sea around her. Now I can speak to that distant land, and my voice travels there wirelessly.

"Hello! Hello! Are you there, my child?"

But the reality around me is sober and mechanical. I'm in the headquarters of the Dutch Telegraph Office, in a small lifeless studio. A strange apparatus before me. A technician nearby. The earphones, the microphone on the armchair. It is very cold.

This is where Holland converses with its colonists in Java.

My child has been sent to be a page in the government in Java. It is a great honor, but it is hard on a mother.

A bit fearfully, I speak into the microphone:

"Hello! Hello! Are you there, my child?"

In a single second, I have crossed 12000 kilometers, as if it were the distance between two rooms.

And within that second, my daughter's voice comes back

II. Java

What I love most about Java are the moments I wake up.

I stay just a little longer in bed to listen to all the tropical noises. Birds twittering, monkeys echoing through the jungle. I hear soft, strange, beautiful music coming from the village. Gamelan music. Then I go outside, enjoying the fresh morning fragrance and admiring all those colorful flowers and the Durian trees.

My house is built on poles and made of stone and bamboo. The doors and windows are painted green.

On top of the house is a red zinc roof. Underneath the house I often hide with the other children.

Sometimes we go right into the jungle. It is always hot and magical, and it always has a special smell

— a bit of snakes and all sorts of plants. I watch my steps in this strange, lovely kingdom. The atmosphere is so unreal, like a paradise or Eden.

In the evening, lying in bed, I listen again to the gamelan in the village, and I miss you.

You are so far

away.

III. Wireless Connections

Are you there mum?

Is everything fine with you, mum?

I miss you mum!

Well ... it is hot here in Java

Is granddad with you?

Okay, have a good night then.

Yes, my child. I can definitely recognize your voice!

Yes, dear ... so good to hear your voice.

I miss you too, my child.

And it's storming here in Holland!

Nope, he has not come.

Good night, my child

The voice from the East. Nothing is farther apart than the two straits that separate us. In this way the world grows closer and closer, even as we move further apart.

Each phone call was allowed to last 6 minutes at most. Six minutes, it seemed far too short. The six minutes passed, and the voice comes to a halt. The headphone is silent, the microphone lies on the table in the Dutch Telegraph Office.

Later, when I lie in my white bed, I can still hear my child's voice: the memory, the ecstasy. No poem,

no music is more beautiful than that. Holland and Java lie in the deepest part of a mother's heart, and in every sigh is a wireless signal: *Hello, oh, my child...*

—"The Dutch Telegraph Office" & "Wireless Connections" adapted from *Hallo Bandeong, hier Den Haag!* (1928). Translation by Jerry Chu. Used by permission. "Java" adapted from *Memories of My Youth in the Dutch East-Indies* by Elizabeth van Kampen. Used by permission.

Ochre

Music by Caroline Shaw / words from various sources

From the Composer:

I like to write music for voices without text, because it allows the voice to be a colorful instrument independent of language. And I like to combine different kinds of text, fragments from various eras and sources, to build a nuanced frame for thinking about a subject. *Ochre* lives more in vowels and timbres than in text, but I've woven in fragments of Tennyson's "In Memoriam" (which frames human existence with metaphors of geologic time, iron ore, rock), as well as a partial setting of Goethe's *Wanderers Nachtlied* in Longfellow's translation. (Goethe was a geologist, and goethite — a common mineral in ochres — is named for him.) In general, there is both a mournful quality to this material, but also a sense of joy and wonder about the planet, and really about music and the voice.

The fifth movement contains the formula for the iron oxide compound hematite — Fe_2O_3 in its unhydrated form, resulting in red ochre — and $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ for the yellow ochre of hydrated hematite.

I have been inspired by the work of Heidi Gustafson, an artist and ochre specialist. From her *Dust to Dust: A Geology of Color*:

Humans are themselves displays of complex sedimentary process. "In the human there is material, fragment, abundance, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos," a stone-loving Nietzsche once proclaimed (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 117). We grow magnetite rocks in our heads, hematite in our organs, carbonates in our bones, gorgeous crystalline geodes in our kidneys, and when we die, our minerals are redistributed, largely as ashes or clumps of carbon, oxygen, calcium, phosphorus, nitrogen, and a handful of others elements. Dust to dust.

I. wordless

II. Overall

quiet now

hearest thou

a breath

—fragments from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wanderers Nachtlied 2*

The solid earth whereon we tread.

In tracts of the fluent heat began

And grew to seeming random forms

The seeming prey of cyclic storms

Till at last arose the man.

—Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Canto 118

III. Scarpèd cliff and quarried stone

—Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Canto 56

IV. wordless

V. *Mille regretz, que vous abandonner*

Et d'eslonger...

Qu'on me verra [brief mes jours definer.]

My brief days...so soon

Translation:

A thousand regrets at deserting you
and leaving behind...

That it seems [soon my days will dwindle away.]

–fragment from a 15th-c. chansons att. to Josquin des PrezVI. Contemplate all this work of
Time,

...

As dying Nature's earth and lime;
Within oneself, from more to more

...

Life is not as idle ore.

–Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Canto 118

VII.	hear	hush	still	quiet	sleep
	now	you	all	wait	soon

sleepers' prayer

Words and music by David Lang

From the Composer:

sleepers' prayer was originally written for boy soprano and organ, and I arranged it for chamber choir in 2019. The commissioners – the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Jacaranda – specifically asked me to write a piece that would include the spectacular and powerful organ in Walt Disney Hall. I am a little scared of concert organs – their sound can be overwhelming, and I started wondering if I could make the fear of being overwhelmed part of the piece. I thought if I had a very small and fragile voice singing along with the organ, we would care about the power imbalance between the two. It might make us feel that the singer needed both support and protection from the organ, the way we all need support and protection from the world, and from life in general.

Then I remembered the prayers that religious Jews say before going to bed. The prospective sleeper might say these prayers to calm himself or herself, to give thanks, and to ask for protection in the night, when the sleeper is most vulnerable and unguarded. For my text, I rewrote a portion of these prayers, trying to focus on just how fragile peacefulness really is, and on how much we need it.

when sleep falls upon my eyes

let me lie down in peace
let me rise up again in peace

no evil dreams
no sleep of death

no snare
no sorrow
no terror by night
no arrow by day

no thousand at my left
no ten thousand at my right

let me lie down in peace
let me rise up again in peace
let me find my better self

when I go out
when I come in
when I lie down
when I rise up

in life
in peace
now and forever
by day
by night

when I lie down
when I rise up

let me lie down in peace
let me rise up again in peace

at my right hand
at my left hand
before me
behind me
above me