

operamission and **AOP Helping Hands** present:

# it is my song that's flown...

All new music

Sunday, March 1, 2009, 7:00 p.m.

Great Room, South Oxford Space, Fort Greene, Brooklyn, New York

**Alissa Rose, soprano**  
**Jennifer Peterson, piano**

art songs by **Tom Cipullo, Renée Favand-See, Kristin Kuster, John Levey, Raymond Lustig, Gregory Spears, Tim Sullivan, and Stephen Andrew Taylor**

## *PROGRAM*

The Rain Was Ending (Laurence Binyon) **John Levey**

The Black Riders (Stephen Crane) **Gregory Spears**

*Songs for a Dead Bird* **Tim Sullivan**

Dirge for a Pet Sparrow (Catullus)  
From a Letter from Lesbia (Dorothy Parker)  
A Sparrow has Died (Suchoon Mo)  
Obituary (Weldon Kees)

Soon (Sappho) **Kristin Kuster**

## *intermission*

The Orchestra (Kim Stanley Robinson) **Stephen Andrew Taylor**

*Late Summer* **Tom Cipullo**

Crickets (William Heyen)  
...Summer into Autumn Slips (Emily Dickinson)  
Touch Me (Stanley Kunitz)

*Lonesome Songs* **Renée Favand-See**

River (Denise Levertov)  
Driving a Highway in Eastern Washington (Molly See)  
Laurels (Corin See)

the silvery round moon (Walt Whitman) **Raymond Lustig**

*please join us for an informal reception after the recital*

**American Opera Projects, Inc. (AOP)** is a driving force behind the revitalization of contemporary opera and musical theater in the United States through its exclusive devotion to creating, developing, and presenting new American opera and music theater projects. In the past year, AOP has partnered with the Royal Opera House, Glimmerglass Opera, Opera Santa Barbara, SUNY Purchase Opera and others to develop and present new works. Premiere productions have appeared at the Lincoln Center Festival, Skirball Center at NYU, the Guggenheim Museum, Symphony Space, the Annenberg Center in Philadelphia, the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts, The Goethe Institute, Berlin's Stükke Theater and Max Kade Auditorium, the Ensemble Theater am Petersplatz in Vienna, Aleksander Fredro Theatre in Gniezno, Poland, Tel Aviv Yafo Music Center, the Center for Jewish History, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and at many out-of-doors performances sponsored by the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation. AOP won a 2006 *Encore* award from the Arts & Business Council of New York for its innovative work.

**AOP Helping Hands** supports the creation and presentation of new music by providing artists with administrative structure, organizational support and community outreach.

[www.operaprojects.org](http://www.operaprojects.org)

### Texts, notes, bios

from **Alissa Rose**

Early on in my doctoral studies at the University of Michigan, I started thinking about having one of my DMA recitals be all new works. My first opera (Eric Funk's *Pamelia*, in 1989) was a world premiere, and I've sung many premieres and second performances since then, so I was interested in getting back to singing more new music while I was in school.

The first composers to come on board for this project were Tim Sullivan, a friend of mine at Michigan, and Kristin Kuster, who I met in New York. I was engaged to sing *Myrrha*, a piece of Kristin's for three sopranos, male chorus, and orchestra, in May of 2006, and simply loved the piece. So when I got a chance, I asked Kristin if she had anything else I could sing, and that discussion led to *Soon*, which she wrote for me. Tim is married to a wonderful mezzo-soprano, Lorraine Yaros Sullivan, so I guessed early in our acquaintance that he might be interested in writing for the voice, and we started discussing possibilities, eventually picking poetry together which evolved into *Songs for a Dead Bird*.

I spoke to the other two composers who wrote for me on this program, Renée Favand-See and John Levey, once it seemed that my idea for an all new music recital might come to fruition. Renee has been a friend of mine for several years, so I was excited to sing some of her music, and she began working on songs for me in the summer of 2007. I met John at Michigan, and asked him in the spring of 2007 if he could write a short piece to round out my recital for the following fall.

I had some other new music, including a cycle written for me at Oberlin when I was an undergraduate, but when I finally got all the music together and tried to come up with a concert order, I realized that what I had would not work as a dissertation recital. I quickly put together a Lieder recital, and all of this fantastic new music got put on the back burner while I finished my degree.

To make a long story not all that short, the recital was rescheduled several times with various pianists before ending up in the incarnation in which you now hear it. I added *Late Summer* to the program, and Jennifer Peterson suggested that we add "The Black Riders," "The Orchestra," and "the silvery round moon." Jennifer and I performed the bulk of this program last month at Mansfield University of Pennsylvania, where I am an Assistant Professor of Voice.

My favorite roles include Susanna, Adele, Gretel, Die Sekretärin in *Rufen Sie Herrn Plim*, and the soprano solos in Haydn's *Creation*. Thank you to all of the composers for your music and your time; this has been a wonderful experience.

[www.alissarose.net](http://www.alissarose.net)

from **Jennifer Peterson**

Occasionally...rarely...I open an email that causes me to sit up and feel a rush of excitement, which was the case on December 15 when I read from soprano Alissa Rose (a total stranger): "Hai-Ting Chinn recommended you as a pianist for a new music recital I'm planning to do..." Okay, there we go, I thought. I was happy.

Alissa and I have a couple of biographical bits in common with each other, or closely related, which made for a stimulating collaboration. We both studied at the Oberlin College-Conservatory of Music, although at different times; Alissa was a horn player, I was a violinist; and we are musical cousins in that we both did extensive work in graduate school with students of the great teacher of accompanying Gwendolyn Koldofsky -- Alissa with Martin Katz at Michigan, myself with Jean Barr in Rochester. Because of this, I found that Alissa is a rare singer who really cares about and understands all the intricacies and details of the music she's singing.

My work over the past five years with AOP has taken me back to a passion I developed in school of collaborating with composers on new music, or as I call it, "really hard shit." My career is in an in-between state where my most serious drive is in my conducting work, i.e. putting things together, and I am forever enraptured with Handel's operas and baroque music in general. But yes, I have been fortunate to be able to make my living coaching singers since my move to NYC in 1997. It is surprisingly rare when we 'coaches' are given the opportunity to perform recitals. But yeah, that's pretty much what we were trained to do in those fancy music schools. So thanks, Alissa, for stumbling upon me.

Two of this evening's composers were new to me, John Levey and Tim Sullivan, and I have found great enjoyment bringing their pieces to life for the first time. I know five of the others quite well from AOP's 'Composers & the Voice' Workshop Series, and first met Tom Cipullo through baritone Chris Trakas on a memorable night of a recital for which Tom & I shared pianist duties.

Two brief highlights of our preparation for me were:

1) when Renée Favand-See joined us in my tiny studio to work with us. I knew Renée back at Eastman and have loved that we still run into each other pretty often. But this was my first time getting inside her music. Somehow her personal touch was such a vivid encapsulation of the 'composer/premiere' experience as I feel it: she talked about how the poetry had come about, and made simple little gestures and other hand signals that I felt were at that moment embedding themselves in the music for Alissa & me, as well as for future performers in some kind of mysterious subliminal way.

2) when Alissa mentioned that she might want 10-15 more minutes of music...I jumped on it. I brought in a stack of AOP 'C&V' songs (not all 180 of them, but maybe 8-10). One of my favorites from the five years of 'C&V' workshops was the song Steve Taylor wrote for mezzo-soprano Abby Fischer, 'The Orchestra' - so I emailed Steve because I seemed to remember he had done a soprano version of this song. It was December 24; he wrote back that no, he had done a baritone version, but that he would send me one in a couple of days, and asked for a description of Alissa's voice. I sent him a soundclip of her singing "Deh vieni, non tardar" from Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and lo & behold received back a .pdf file of a new version of 'The Orchestra' the morning of December 26. And keep in mind that Steve has two kids and took them from Urbana-Champaign to the Chicago Field Museum during the same time period.

I am also very excited about Greg Spears' work on his new opera, *Paul's Case*, based on Willa Cather's short story by the same name from 1906. He is intertwining these three Stephen Crane love poems into his opera in fascinating ways too complicated to go into in this notes, so I hope you will enjoy the germ of the material as he originally crafted it for Donna Smith in our 'C&V' sessions, and feel a welcome return to it once we put the entire opera on its feet. If you're interested, please speak to Greg or me about this project.

Tom Cipullo, John Levey, and Steve Taylor have all expressed regrets that they couldn't make it to Brooklyn for this performance. Tom is having a big piece performed in New Bedford, MA this weekend; John is finishing his doctoral thesis (actually two of them simultaneously) in Michigan; and Steve is flying somewhere else, busy with teaching, and will be coming to NYC in a few weeks.

## Composers:

**John Levey** is currently a Regents Fellow at the University of Michigan, where he is pursuing a joint Ph.D. in Composition and Music Theory. He holds a M.M. in Composition from the University of Michigan and a B.M. in Composition from the Oberlin College Conservatory. His principal composition teachers include William Bolcom, Bright Sheng, and Susan Botti at the University of Michigan, and Lewis Nielson, Jeffrey Mumford, and Nancy Galbraith at other institutions.

John was named the 2008 ASCAP Young Composer Fellow at the Bowdoin Music Festival, where he studied with Samuel Adler. He has also twice attended the Aspen Music Festival as a student of George Tsontakis. Recent performances of his works have taken place at the Music07 Festival in Cincinnati, Harvard University, Boston College, and the Chelsea Art Museum in New York City. Upcoming exhibitions include the premiere of his *Concertino* by flutist Sarah Tiedemann.

[www-personal.umich.edu/~jclevey](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jclevey)

### **Laurence Binyon**

#### ***The Rain Was Ending, And Light***

The rain was ending, and light  
Lifting the leaden skies.  
It shone upon ceiling and floor  
And dazzled a child's eyes.

Pale after fever, a captive  
Apart from his schoolfellows,  
He stood at the high room's window  
With face to the pane pressed close,

And beheld an immense glory  
Flooding with fire the drops  
Spilled on miraculous leaves  
Of the fresh green lime-tree tops.

Washed gravel glittered red  
To a wall, and beyond it nine  
Tall limes in the old inn yard  
Rose over the tall inn sign.

And voices arose from beneath  
Of boys from school set free,  
Racing and chasing each other  
With laughter and games and glee.

To the boy at the high room-window,  
Gazing alone and apart,  
There came a wish without reason,  
A thought that shone through his heart.

I'll choose this moment and keep it,  
He said to himself, for a vow,  
To remember for ever and ever  
As if it were always now.

**Gregory Spears** has written music for the American Composers Orchestra, the New York Youth Symphony, the NOW Ensemble, So Percussion and Eighth Blackbird. His music has won prizes from ASCAP and BMI as well as grants and honors from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Fulbright Foundation and Yaddo. Recent commissions have come from the Present Music Ensemble, the Bard Summer Music Festival and choreographer Christopher Williams. In 2007 Spears worked with musicologist Simon Morrison to reconstruct the original score for Prokofiev's ballet *Romeo and Juliet* for premiere by the Mark Morris Dance Group. For the 2007-2008 season, Spears was a participant in American Opera Projects' 'Composers & the Voice' Residency Program.

In addition to composing, Gregory teaches a Writing Seminar at Princeton University called *Music and Madness*. He lives in Brooklyn.

[www.gregoryspears.com](http://www.gregoryspears.com)

**Stephen Crane**  
*And you love me*

And you love me

I love you.

You are, then, cold coward.

Aye; but, beloved,  
When I strive to come to you,  
Man's opinions, a thousand thickets,  
My interwoven existence,  
My life,  
Caught in the stubble of the world  
Like a tender veil --  
This stays me.  
No strange move can I make  
Without noise of tearing  
I dare not.

If love loves,  
There is no world  
Nor word.  
All is lost  
Save thought of love  
And place to dream.  
You love me?

from **Tim Sullivan**

When Alissa and I began talking about a set of songs, I asked her for some ideas about texts. Among several poems she suggested, the one that really struck me was Weldon Kees' obituary for the parrot named Boris. I don't remember exactly how it happened, but somehow one of us got the idea that all of the songs should be about dead birds!

In the end, I was drawn to these particular texts because they explore such a variety of emotional responses - in addition to the expected melancholy and sadness, there is dark humor, derision, spirituality, and a screaming idealistic parrot...what more could you ask for?

[www.timsullivan.info](http://www.timsullivan.info)

**Gaius Valerius Catullus**

*On the Death of Lesbia's Sparrow* (originally in Latin)

Weep every Venus, and all Cupids wail,  
And men whose gentler spirits still prevail.  
Dead is the Sparrow of my girl, the joy,  
Sparrow, my sweetening's most delicious toy,  
Whom loved she dearer than her very eyes;  
For he was honeyed-pet and anyway  
Knew her, as even she her mother knew;  
Ne'er from her bosom's harbourage he flew  
But 'round her hopping here, there, everywhere,  
Piped he to none but her his lady fair.  
Now must he wander o'er the darkling way  
Thither, whence life-return the Fates deny.  
But ah! beshrew you, evil Shadows low'ring  
In Orcus ever loveliest things devouring:  
Who bore so pretty a Sparrow fro' her ta'en.  
(Oh hapless birdie and Oh deed of bane!)  
Now by your wanton work my girl appears  
With turgid eyelids tinted rose by tears.

I love you.

You are, then, cold coward.

Aye; but, beloved --

***Should the wide world roll away***

Should the wide world roll away,  
Leaving black terror,  
Limitless night,  
Nor God, nor man, nor place to stand  
Would be to me essential,  
If thou and thy white arms were there,  
And the fall to doom a long way.

***Ay, workman, make me a dream***

Ay, workman, make me a dream,  
A dream for my love.  
Cunningly weave sunlight,  
Breezes, and flowers.  
Let it be of the cloth of meadows.  
And -- good workman --  
And let there be a man walking thereon.

**Dorothy Parker**

*From A Letter From Lesbia*

... So, praise the gods, Catullus is away!  
And let me tend you this advice, my dear:  
Take any lover that you will, or may,  
Except a poet. All of them are queer.

It's just the same -- a quarrel or a kiss  
Is but a tune to play upon his pipe.  
He's always hymning that or wailing this;  
Myself, I much prefer the business type.

That thing he wrote, the time the sparrow died --  
(Oh, most unpleasant -- gloomy, tedious words!)  
I called it sweet, and made believe I cried;  
The stupid fool! I've always hated birds ...

**Suchoon Mo*****A Sparrow Has Died*** (after Ko Un)

a sparrow has died  
there is no funeral

let dirge and elegy  
be silent

there is no grave  
no tomb stone

space has no address  
time has no clock

the sound of suffering  
is no more

the dead is mute  
the sky is deaf

a sparrow has died

**Weldon Kees*****Obituary***

Boris is dead. The fatalist parrot  
No longer screams warnings to Avenue A.  
He died last week on a rainy day.  
He is sadly missed. His spirit was rare.

The cage is empty. The unhooked chain,  
His pitiful drippings, the sunflower seeds,  
The brass sign, "Boris" are all that remain.  
His irritable body is under the weeds.

Like Eliot's world, he went out with a whimper;  
Silent for days, with his appetite gone,  
He watched the traffic flow by, unheeding,  
His universe crumbling, his heart a stone.

No longer will Boris cry, "Out brief candle!"  
Or "Down with tyranny, hate, and war!"  
To astonished churchgoers and businessmen.  
Boris is dead. The porch is a tomb.  
And a black wreath decorates the door.

Composer **Kristin Kuster** "writes commandingly for the orchestra," and her music "has an invitingly tart edge" (*The New York Times*). Ms. Kuster's colorfully enthralling compositions take inspiration from architectural space, the weather, and mythology. American Composers Orchestra commissioned and premiered Ms. Kuster's "lush and visceral" *Myrrha* for voices and orchestra in Carnegie Hall in May 2006. Ms. Kuster's premieres in 2008 included *The Trickster and the Troll* with the Heartland Opera Troupe, *Perpetual Noon* with Boston Symphony flutist Jennifer Nitchman, *Ribbon Earth* with the Summerfest Chamber Series, *Beneath This Stone* with the Annapolis Symphony, *Redness* with the New York Central City Chorus, and *Lost Gulch Lookout* with the University of Georgia Wind Ensemble. Ms. Kuster's music has received support from such organizations as the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Sons of Norway, American Composers Orchestra, the League of American Orchestras, Meet The Composer, the Jerome Foundation, the American Composers Forum, American Opera Projects, the National Flute Association, the Argosy Foundation, the Composers Conference at Wellesley College, and the Larson Family Foundation. Born in 1973, Ms. Kuster grew up in Boulder, Colorado. She earned her Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Michigan, where she now serves as Assistant Professor of Composition. Ms. Kuster divides her time living in both Ann Arbor and New York City with her husband Andrew and son Odin.

[www.kristinkuster.com](http://www.kristinkuster.com)

**Sappho** (translated by Kristin Kuster)  
**from *Hymn to Aphrodite****Fragment:*

Even if she flies, soon she shall follow:  
If she does not accept gifts, she shall soon give;  
And if she does not love, she soon shall love, however loath.  
Come to me now again, please come, release my cruel cares;  
fulfill all that my heart longs to fulfill,  
and be my ally.

**Stephen Andrew Taylor** composes music that explores boundaries between art and science. His first orchestra commission, *Unapproachable Light*—inspired by images from the Hubble Space Telescope and the New Testament—was premiered by the American Composers Orchestra in 1996 in Carnegie Hall. Other works include the chamber quartet *Quark Shadows*, commissioned by the Chicago Symphony; and *Seven Memorials*, a half-hour cycle for piano inspired by the work of Maya Lin and featured at Tanglewood in 2006. Excerpts from a new opera based on a novella by Ursula K. Le Guin have been performed recently by the New York City Opera and American Opera Projects. Highlights in 2008-09 include performances in New York, Miami, Washington DC, Amsterdam, Belgrade, Toronto, Mexico City, and the Bali Arts Festival. His music has won awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Debussy Trio, the Howard Foundation, the College Band Directors National Association, Conservatoire Américain de Fontainebleau, the New York State Federation of Music Clubs, the Illinois Arts Council, the American Music Center, and ASCAP. Born in 1965, Taylor studied at Northwestern and Cornell Universities, and California Institute of the Arts. He teaches at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he conducts the New Music Ensemble; he lives there with his wife and two children.

Steve writes:

“The Orchestra is a setting of a short triplet by Kim Stanley Robinson from his novel *The Memory of Whiteness*, which is really hard to describe - it's about a prodigy in the year 3229 who plays a massive musical instrument known as The Orchestra, taking a grand tour of the solar system from Neptune to Mercury. But I love the optimism of the poem.”

**Kim Stanley Robinson**  
from the novel *The Memory of Whiteness*

A music leads the mind through the starry night  
And the brain must expand to contain the flight  
Like a tree growing branches at the speed of light

from **Tom Cipullo**

**Late Summer** began as a single song, *Crickets*, composed for the Joy in Singing's millennium celebration at Merkin Hall. Eventually, I began searching for other poems that might complete a small cycle. I confess I searched somewhat fervently for other “crickets” poems, hoping perhaps to sell the entire cycle to a convention of tuneful entomologists. Eventually, I came upon the Kunitz poem that made the whole universe right.

*Crickets* is dedicated to Meagan Miller and *Touch me* to Karen Holvik, both fabulous artists and dear friends. The composer would like to thank the MacDowell Colony, the site where the last two songs were written.

**William Heyen**  
*Crickets*

Evenings, where lawns are not sprayed with poisons,  
you can still hear the crickets,  
you can still see lightning bugs signalling,

look, a yellowgreen strobe under the trees,  
but gone, but there again, sometimes  
in the same spot, and sometimes not,

as the tiny purveyors of phosphor  
drift past our houses, looking  
for one another, and the crickets,

crickets, crickets, the ones that still  
have their legs, keep scraping them together,  
listen, maybe for the last time on earth, listen. . . .

**Emily Dickinson**  
*As Summer into Autumn slips*

As Summer into Autumn slips  
And yet we sooner say  
"The Summer" than "the Autumn," lest  
We turn the sun away,

And almost count it an Affront  
The presence to concede  
Of one however lovely, not  
The one that we have loved --

So we evade the charge of Years  
On one attempting shy  
The Circumvention of the Shaft  
Of Life's Declivity.

**Stanley J. Kunitz**  
*Touch Me*

Summer is late, my heart.  
Words plucked out of the air  
some forty years ago  
when I was wild with love  
and torn almost in two  
scatter like leaves this night  
of whistling wind and rain.  
It is my heart that's late,  
it is my song that's flown.  
Outdoors all afternoon  
under a gunmetal sky  
staking my garden down,  
I kneeled to the crickets trilling  
underfoot as if about  
to burst from their crusty shells;  
and like a child again  
marveled to hear so clear  
and brave a music pour  
from such a small machine.  
What makes the engine go?  
Desire, desire, desire.  
The longing for the dance  
stirs in the buried life.  
One season only,  
and it's done.  
So let the battered old willow  
thrash against the windowpanes  
and the house timbers creak.  
Darling, do you remember  
the man you married? Touch me,  
remind me who I am.

from **Renée Favand-See**

Alissa is an old friend and I have admired her voice and artistry for years, so when she invited me to write her a song cycle for an ambitious recital of all new works I was delighted by the opportunity. Her clear tone and ability to smoothly move through her entire vocal range and color each phrase just as she pleases lends her performance of my songs a speech-like ease and directness which is perfect for the poems I have chosen to set. I am thrilled by the success of this first collaboration and look forward to more to come.



**Denise Levertov***River*

Dreaming the sea that  
   lies beyond me  
 I have enough depth  
   to know I am shallow.

I have my pools, my bowls  
   of rock I flow  
 into and fill, but I must  
   brim my own banks, persist,  
 vanish at last in greater flood  
   yet still within it  
 follow my task,  
   dreaming towards  
 the calling sea.

**Molly See***Driving a highway in Eastern Washington*

Odessa to Harrington,  
 lonesome songs.  
 Field stubble,  
 cloud ripple,  
 shadows of grey and yellow.  
 Bottom lands flat as if they'd been sanded.  
 Fields fallow  
 done for the year,  
 combed up in waves, warm, brown.  
 Once in a while  
 lost in the hollows,  
 a town.

from **Ray Lustig**

Ray Lustig's music has been performed in symphony halls, clubs, pubs, galleries, and museums -- from Le Poisson Rouge to Lincoln Center -- and at festivals around the world. He is currently completing his doctorate at the Juilliard School, where his teachers have included John Corigliano, Robert Beaser, Samuel Adler, and Philip Lasser.

Of the piece, he writes:

“‘The silvery round moon’ started as an assignment, in AOP’s ‘Composers & the Voice’ workshop, to do the thoroughly unadvisable: to set Walt Whitman’s poetry as music. The task was driving me mad, MAD I tell you! And so the song came out as a lunatic’s love howl at the moon. Alissa and Jennifer’s eerie and gorgeous take on this gives me goose bumps.”

**Walt Whitman**from *Drum-Taps: Dirge for Two Veterans*

Lo! the moon ascending!  
 Up from the east, the silvery round moon;  
 Beautiful over the house tops, ghastly phantom moon;  
   Immense and silent moon.

Our ninth composer, **Ryan Streber**, is moonlighting as audio engineer. Thank you, Ryan.

[www.ryanstreber.com](http://www.ryanstreber.com)

**Corin See***Laurels*

You can grow tired of looking at the laurels;  
 June woods are lousy with these pink-white constellations.  
 Grandmother's tires drift down the back roads  
 Like a team of studied horses  
 The track's in their rubbery bones.  
 Passing periwinkled foundations and chimneys,  
 Resolute in the years-deep leaves,  
 Rusted fences fastened to trunks,  
 The sun on the dark fallen firs.

Out into a slanting pasture –  
 Again, across there, she gestures at laurels.

But wise grandmothers point 'cause they know  
 The thinking of the shining leaf,  
 The gnarled branches that lift from stony soil;  
 They can be burnt to the ground thrice-over.  
 Consider these returning flowers.