



The Department of Music presents  
*Ryan MacEvoy McCullough, piano*  
*and*  
*David Salsbery Fry, bass*

*Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco* (1980) for 8-channel tape  
(“Wake the Dead, Call the Living to Prayer”)

Jonathan Harvey  
(1939-2012)

*Haiku* (1997) for piano

Harvey

*Vers* (2000) for piano

Harvey

*Tombeau de Messiaen* (1994) for piano and tape

Harvey

Ryan MacEvoy McCullough, piano

*Things That Woof and Things That Roar: Seven Songs for Jim Henson* (2015-2018)

[world premiere]

1. *Faraway Child*

2. *A Rainbow in My Hair (Miss Piggy)*

3. *Mokey's Cradle Song*

4. *Me Want Relievo (me ho ho)*

5. *Not Alone (Kermit)*

6. *Wembley's Thingamajig (May 16, 1990)*

7. *The Hospice of my Heart*

texts by Dennis Lee (b. 1939)

Osnat Netzer (b. 1979)

Ruby Fulton (b. 1981)

Lembit Beecher (b. 1980)

Shawn Allison (b. 1976)

Nicholas Vines (b. 1976)

Eric Nathan (b. 1983)

Netzer

with David Salsbery Fry, bass

BARNES HALL  
CORNELL UNIVERSITY  
Friday, March 1, 2019 – 8:00 PM

Praised for his “extremely sensual and almost impossibly deep tones” by *concerti*, bass **David Salsbery Fry** is the grand prize winner and reigning laureate of the Bidu Sayão International Vocal Competition. A tireless advocate for new music, in the 2016-17 season alone he created roles in three world premiere operas: Scott Wheeler’s *Naga*, Louis Karchin’s *Jane Eyre*, and Chaya Czernowin’s *Infinite Now* (“World Premiere of the Year” in the 2017 *Opernwelt* critics survey). This summer he will premiere the role of the Head of the Shin Bet in Adam Maor’s *The Sleeping Thousand* at Festival d’Aix-en-Provence.

Other notable engagements include Mr. Butt & Butt the Hoopoe in Wuorinen’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* for BMOP, Osmin in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* for St. Petersburg Opera, Don Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for Vero Beach Opera, Truffaldin in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Tanglewood, Arkel in *Pelléas et Mélisande* and Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* in Tel Aviv, his Mostly Mozart debut in Stravinsky’s *Renard*, and Olin Blitch in *Susannah* with Opera at Rutgers.

Mr. Fry studied at Juilliard, the University of Maryland, and Johns Hopkins and apprenticed with The Santa Fe Opera. His recordings are available from Albany, BMOP/sound, Navona, Naxos, VIA Records and WERGO. David is a proud member of the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA).

More on Mr. Fry’s life and career can be found at [davidsalsberyfry.com](http://davidsalsberyfry.com) and in the October 2015 issue of *Classical Singer Magazine*.

## Program Notes

In March of 2012, the English composer Jonathan Harvey, by that point suffering from the final stages of motor neuron disease, messily scribbled the following in his lifelong work diary, a ratty book aptly titled “Thoughts” :

*Poetry, vision, religion and near death experiences all show the primacy of light. When the biological body drops away, consciousness becomes impervious to temperature, and can ‘inhabit’ stars, or the Sun. Quantum physics, as well as parapsychology, accepts non-locality (or vast distance) in particles and thought (consciousness). Light is my aim...*

This was his last entry, the rest of the book poignantly blank, especially notable after 50 years of similarly pithy scribbles. He would die later that year, barely able to move, yet still trying to compose as he had his entire life: seeking an ephemeral mode of composition that took air, flight, and sublimation as its primary inspirations. There is little that is melancholy about his language—largely built from the crystalline fragments of high modernist complexity, as if crushed by the post-modernist hammer of John Cage—but one gets the distinct sense that much of his musical practice was a conscious engagement with mortality. He writes, “Music is a kind of practice for death. Although that may sound morbid to us, in a Buddhist perspective ‘death’ is just a keener exposure to the problems of the lives both preceding and to follow, so it is entirely relevant to life now.”

This small sampling of his works, in what would have been his 80th year, gives a clear idea of this vision. *Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco* takes as its material two sources: the tenor bell of Winchester Cathedral, upon which is inscribed HORAS AVOLANTES NUMERO, MORTUOS PLANGO, VIVOS AD PRECES VOCO (“I count the fleeting hours, I lament the dead, I call the living to prayer”); and the voice of Harvey’s son, Dominic, then a chorister at the Cathedral. In this piece, composed during the painstaking early years of computer composition, boy and bell are deconstructed and reconstituted as facets of each other, structured like a bell stroke, “from the spectacular to the inward.”

*Haiku* is a piece that almost isn’t. And then it is...

*Vers* was composed for a 75th birthday celebration of Pierre Boulez, and Harvey seems to have struggled for quite some time over what to write, then composed it in rather a flash. Written 'towards' a climactic quotation from an older work from the 80s, *Bhakti*, Harvey is searching for the improvisational, intuitive language (inspired by Theodore Adorno's manifesto to the avant-garde, "Vers une Musique Informelle") that would define the works of his last decade.

Finally, *Tombeau de Messiaen*, like the Henson suite that follows, is an homage and remembrance of a towering creative figure whom Harvey never knew, but nevertheless shaped who he was as an artist. The piano plays against an invisible, 'ideal' counterpart, a synthetic piano tuned to 12 separate natural harmonic series. Sometimes the two converge, sometimes they grate against another, but real and artificial largely cannot be distinguished, despite what you see with your eyes. "*Kudos: life goes wearily on: disturbed by bells weddings/funerals.*" Life can be described in dualities, but its substance is not the dualities themselves: it's where and how they meet.

—Ryan MacEvoy McCullough

### Background on *Things That Woof and Things That Roar*

Over twenty years ago, I stumbled upon a fascinating set of songs. The concept of the set and the manner in which they came into existence intrigued me. In 1949, Polish bass Doda Conrad commissioned seven songs to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Chopin. He asked the celebrated author Louise de Vilmorin to write seven poems inspired by the life and music of Chopin. Once she delivered the poems, he recruited six composers to set these seven poems to music for bass voice and piano, using a variation on the exquisite corpse technique. He sent one poem to the first composer, then sent that composer's completed song and the next poem to the second composer, etc., until songs 2-6 had been composed. Finally, he sent songs 2-6 and poems 1 and 7 to the final composer. The composers he commissioned were Henri Sauguet (who composed the first and last song), Francis Poulenc, Georges Auric, Jean Françaix, Leo Preger, and Darius Milhaud, and the resulting song set is called *Mouvements du cœur*.

What an amazing concept! Seven songs, unified by their poetry, which was created especially for the work, but allowing for the unique voices of six composers to be heard, while still providing some cohesion by having one composer begin and end the work. Thumbing through the score, I seethed with jealousy. How fortunate Conrad was to have six composers in his life whom he could recruit for such a project. Then came Tanglewood...

I was a Vocal Fellow for Tanglewood Music Center in 2010. I came there to sing Truffaldin in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, in a wonderful production directed by Ira Siff and conducted by Christoph von Dohnányi. Luckily for me, I shared a house that summer with two great guys, pianist William McNally and composer Shawn Allison. Through Shawn, I met the other Composition Fellows at Tanglewood: Lembit Beecher, Ruby Fulton, Eric Nathan (a Cornell doctoral graduate), Osnat Netzer, and Nicholas Vines.

I enjoyed their company and loved their music. It was a life-changing summer. The following fall, as I once again thumbed through *Mouvements du Cœur* and once again seethed with jealousy at Conrad's good fortune and clever idea, I had a bit of a facepalm moment. How many composers were at Tanglewood last summer? Six. I had just met six amazing composers, bound together by a common experience. Ryan was also a fellow that summer, and we performed some Duparc songs together. I loved collaborating with him and was keen to find another opportunity. Tanglewood of 2010 just became my Paris of 1949.

In the fall of 2010, I approached all six of these remarkable young composers and pitched them the idea of emulating Conrad's commissioning project from 1949. To my delight, everyone was incredibly

enthusiastic and encouraging. Our first task was to select the person whose memory we would honor with the piece. Who would be our Chopin? Since Conrad and Chopin were both Polish, I felt it important to find an American artist to honor, whose cultural legacy and significance were as established and quantifiable as Chopin's.

In the conversations that followed, the seven of us decided with remarkable speed on Jim Henson. Henson's work had touched all of our lives in manifold ways, both as children and as adults. His cultural impact is undeniable, and his untimely death 29 years ago continues to sting. Henson inspired us all; it seemed only fitting that he would be the inspiration for this composition.

Coincidentally, I had some connection to the Henson family. My brother Michael had worked for the Muppet Workshop in NYC for a time and knew Jim's daughter Cheryl from his work there. I met Jim's widow Jane Henson (who died in 2013) in 2010 at a reception for a project I was working on that was funded in part by The Jim Henson Foundation. I reached out to Cheryl Henson to ask for her blessing to move forward with the project and to ask who she would like to have write the poems to commemorate her father. It felt right to give the Henson family the opportunity to select our Louise de Vilmorin. On 11 May 2011, Cheryl gave us a name: Dennis Lee.

Cheryl's suggestion of Dennis Lee could not have been more appropriate and exciting. His career was highly intertwined with Henson's. Dennis was a script editor for *The Dark Crystal*, co-writer of the story for *Labyrinth*, and writer of the lyrics for nearly all of the songs in *Fraggle Rock*. Dennis is also justly famous and beloved in Canada for his children's poetry. As we delved further into his career and output, we discovered his fabulous poetry for adults, and that's when everything fell into place. We had to work with Dennis, at all costs.

Osnat Netzer, the composer I hoped to commission to write the first and last song of this set, had recently received a commission from Dr. Faustus to write a song cycle, with her choice of both singer and text. We took advantage of this commission to establish a working relationship with Dennis. I reached out to him to ask if he had any existing poems that he would permit us to set to music. On 17 September 2011, he suggested we look through his two most recent collections of poetry, *un* (2003) and *yesno* (2007). Osnat and I quickly fell in love with the eighth group of poems in *yesno*, and on 28 January 2012 Dennis granted Osnat permission to set this group to music. The resulting song cycle, *ten songs of yesno*, premiered at WMP Concert Hall in NYC on 18 May 2012. Osnat loved composing it, I loved singing it, and, perhaps most importantly, Dennis enjoyed hearing it, and agreed to write the poems for the song cycle you'll be hearing today: *Things That Woof and Things That Roar: Seven Songs for Jim Henson*.

Dennis began writing the poems in April of 2015 and completed work on them in July of 2015, with some occasional tweaks and revisions trickling in until April of 2016.

The composition process began on 1 December 2015, when I sent the text for *A Rainbow in My Hair* to Ruby Fulton and ended on 24 July 2018 when I received Shawn Allison's contribution – *Me Want Relievo (me ho ho)*.

With today's premiere, the journey from concept to performance took 8 1/2 years. I am delighted to have the opportunity to share this work with you. That summer at Tanglewood feels very far away now, but I'm so glad this piece keeps all of us together in spirit, united by our love for Jim Henson and the loss we felt at his passing.

—David Salsbery Fry