

ETERNITY and the UNDER- WORLD



Digital Program
Booklet

Matthew Dirst
Artistic Director

SATURDAY
NOVEMBER 13, 2021 | 7:30 PM

Zilkha Hall, Hobby Center for the Performing Arts

ARS
LYRICA
HOUSTON 

PROGRAM

L'altra Euridice (*The Other Euridice*)

Music by Jonathan Dove (b. 1959)
Libretto by the composer, after Italo Calvino
English translation by Adam Pollock

and

Ich habe genug, BWV 82 (*I have all I need*)

Music by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
To an anonymous libretto

featuring

Douglas Williams as Pluto
Sarah Neal as Euridice

Kathryn Montoya, oboist

*Both works will be performed with English surtitles and without intermission.
The performance will last approximately one hour.*

L'altra Euridice is licensed by arrangement with C. F. Peters Corporation, New York



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music director/conductor	Matthew Dirst
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surtitle operation	Jenna Wallis

ARS LYRICA ORCHESTRAL PERSONNEL

Baroque oboe	Kathryn Montoya
modern oboe (offstage)	Pablo Moreno
soprano saxophone (offstage)	Masahito Sugihara
violin 1	Elizabeth Blumenstock
violin 2	Maria Lin
viola	James Dunham
cello 1	Barrett Sills
cello 2	Eric Smith
double bass	Paul Ellison
theorbo	Michael Leopold
harpsichord	Keith Weber
organ	Matthew Dirst

With special thanks to the Moores School of Music, University of Houston, for use of its double-manual harpsichord (John Phillips, Berkeley) and continuo organ (Bennett-Guittari, Boston), and to St Philip Presbyterian Church for providing rehearsal facilities for this program.

Pluto – a Man of the Earth in *The Other Euridice*

BY DOUGLAS WILLIAMS

Of all the reading I did to indulge my many side interests during the pandemic lockdowns in the last couple of years, the phrase deep time spoke to me and stuck the most. It is a term introduced by the author John McPhee in his 1981 book *Basin and Range*, in which he tags along with a Princeton geologist through one of earth's most fascinating and revealing geological terrains: the Great Basin of Nevada and Utah. For those who study earth science, McPhee explains, their occupation brings them into daily encounters with geological forces and events that took place over hundreds of millions of years, and this expansive chronology actually recalibrates one's own relation to time. Rock records the movement and construction of earth masses, and a trained eye can read the strata and formations like a narrative stretching sometimes billions of years into the past. This is deep time, denoting not only extreme age but also evoking a spiritual humbling that can be felt in the presence and contemplation of something that is so old, and took so long to construct, as earth itself.

Wanting to nurture my growing fascination for geology, and thirsting for vast and inspiring vistas to blow off some lockdown dust, I set off for a three-week adventure in the Great Basin this past July. Nearly every night I went to sleep in the bed of a Toyota pickup truck underneath spectacular skies of far-off diamond stars, and awoke each morning with the sunrise arching over a tall mountain range. In central Nevada, the heart of the Great Basin, I found landscapes so large and empty of humans that I felt closer to the source of creation. In the Ruby Mountains of northeast Nevada, I saw rocks that were once twenty miles beneath the surface of the earth. Millions of years of the earth's crust stretching and the displacement of surface material allowed some of the oldest rock on the planet to be lifted into mountain. The power of earth forces and the immensity of deep time was palpable to me.

Now back in the saddle of making music, I am returning to Jonathan Dove's miniature monodrama, *The Other Euridice*, and in light of my curiosity for natural history I find no coincidence that I take up the character of this particular Pluto, who is very much a man of the earth. In all that's been written about the god of the underworld since classical days, probably no text so fantastically and elaborately describes the geological architecture of his subterranean realm as Italo Calvino's 1968 essay *L'altra Euridice*—from which this opera makes its libretto. Rather than presiding over the gloomy and static land of the dead as it is traditionally depicted in Greek mythology, Calvino's Pluto is the

commander of an inner earth environment of moving rock and shifting clouds of elements.

From the very beginning of the opera, Pluto seeks to correct the surface-dweller's interpretation of the Orpheus myth, and to correct our dour perception of his realm. Calvino uses scientific language as poetry to establish Pluto as the master of a fantastic geological earth interior. This "inside" is the counterpart to the blinding, deafening, artificial "outside" world from which Orpheus comes from to "steal" back Euridice. Pluto's world is a terrain of power, of depth, of silence.

The story of Orpheus traveling to the underworld has been told in a thousand ways. For me, it is this rich inhabitation of Pluto's underworld that makes *The Other Euridice* so unique. His obsessive desire to keep Euridice by his side plays out in a world as real as rock and as fantastic as science fiction. Pluto invites—and then insists—that we contemplate a world usually ignored in our day-to-day existence: the earth-world that our man-made "outside" world is built upon. The libretto reminds me of a line from a Robinson Jeffers poem about rock: "This fate going on outside our fates."

In *The Other Euridice* we journey into this telluric fate. My own recent awakening to the earth's long and awesome story will be present as I, as Pluto, invite the audience to travel with me.

Eternity, the Underworld, and Old Instruments

BY MATTHEW DIRST

Contemporary music on period instruments? This seemingly daft idea found adherents a hundred years ago in Paris, thanks to Wanda Landowska and her sturdy Pleyel harpsichord, which inspired Francis Poulenc, Manuel de Falla and other intrepid composers to write concertos and chamber works for the instrument. More recent compositions call for actual historical replicas of the kind we use regularly (not eccentric experiments like Mme. Landowska's instrument) and often combine their intimate sounds with those of voices, as was common during the long Baroque age.

Tonight's program begins with one such work: Jonathan Dove's one-act opera *L'altra Euridice*, scored for solo baritone plus an ensemble of period strings, obbligato harpsichord and theorbo, plus two modern instruments that play from offstage—thus solving any inherent balance

problems between the old and new instruments. *The Other Euridice* was first performed in 2001 and has been produced a few times since then, including a production in Maine that featured Douglas Williams, who we're delighted to welcome this evening in his Ars Lyrica debut. Joining him in the Dove, as a mute Euridice, is mezzo-soprano Sarah Neal, who also makes her Ars Lyrica debut this evening; she'll be returning to the Zilkha Hall stage in our production of Purcell's *Dido & Aeneas* in May of next year. Her turn to shine comes in the Bach, which follows the Dove so that we can progress together from the lowest to the highest realms of the next life.

Bach's solo cantata *Ich habe genug* was first heard in Leipzig in 1728, on the Feast of the Purification, the annual liturgical celebration of Jesus' presentation in the temple. Scored for solo voice, oboe, strings and continuo, the work seems to have been a personal favorite of the composer: he returned to it around 1735, transposing it up a third and rescoring the solo parts for high voice and flute. Tonight's program offers the original version of this beloved cantata.

Echoing the aged Simeon's poignant words "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace," the anonymous libretto of *Ich habe genug* longs for eternity as both the final exit from worldly suffering and the beginning of a glorious afterlife. Bach's treatment of the three aria texts especially distinguishes this cantata as one of his finest efforts for solo voice. The plaintive opening movement, with its yearning melody, seems to encompass all the world's sadness while affirming paradoxically that the beauty of temporal music leads us into another, less tangible realm. A "slumber" aria of great poignancy follows. Taking his cue from operatic "sleep scenes," Bach turns worldly sleep into an eloquent depiction of the afterlife, with conventional lullaby figures and an unusually expansive formal design. The final aria celebrates the end of life with joyous, dance-like figuration in the voice and instrumental parts, in utter defiance of death.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Douglas Williams has collaborated with leading conductors including Sir Simon Rattle, Nicholas McGegan, Barbara Hannigan, Yannick Nezet-Seguin, Andris Nelsons, Helmut Rilling, and Christoph Rousset, in leading venues throughout North America and Europe. His repertoire reaches over four centuries, being a sought-after interpreter of Monteverdi, Handel, Bach, and Mozart, in addition to the romantic and modern eras. Recent operatic highlights include Nick Shadow in *The Rake's Progress* with the Munich Philharmonic/Barbara Hannigan, his role debut as the title character in *Don Giovanni* with Opera Atelier, and Sciarrone in *Tosca* with Sir Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmoniker at the Baden-Baden Festspielhaus. Recent concert highlights include Mozart's *Requiem* for the Mozarteum Salzburg, a tour and recording of Scarlatti's *La gloria di primavera* with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra / Nicholas McGegan; baroque programs with Les Talens Lyrique; and Charles Wuorinen's *It Happens Like This* with the MET Chamber Ensemble.



Sarah Neal is an up-and-coming lyric mezzo-soprano who received her Masters of Music in Vocal Performance at the University of Houston this past spring, studying under Melanie Sonnenberg. During her time at UH, Sarah performed roles such as Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Dinah in Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, the title role in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, and Nancy in *Albert Herring* by Benjamin Britten. Sarah is grateful to have also prepared and staged the title role in Kevin Puts' contemporary opera, *Elizabeth Cree*, before the production was cancelled due to Covid-19. Prior to Covid-19, Sarah received the Encouragement Award at the Metropolitan Opera National Council's Houston District as well as First Prize in the Madame Rose Scholarship Competition at Mobile Opera. Sarah is thrilled to return to live performance with her Ars Lyrica debut performing J.S. Bach's cantata *Ich habe genug*, and she looks forward to joining Ars Lyrica again in 2022 to perform the role of First Witch in the company's production of *Dido and Aeneas*.



Baroque oboe and recorder player **Kathryn Montoya** appears with a variety of orchestral and chamber music ensembles including the Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra, Tafelmusik, Apollo's Fire, and Handel & Haydn, among others. She currently teaches at Oberlin Conservatory, the Longy School of Music, and has been Baroque oboe and recorder faculty for Longy's International Baroque Institute, Oberlin's BPI, and SFEMS workshops, and has led masterclasses in the US and China. Mrs. Montoya enjoys a varied musical career performing for the Grammy award-winning recording of Charpentier's *La Couronne de Fleurs* with the Boston Early Music Festival, the Globe's productions of *Twelfth Night* and *Richard III* on Broadway, and occasionally touring as a tin whistle player. In her free time, she can be found in Hereford, England converting a 18th century barn into a home with her husband, James.



Stage director **Tara Faircloth**'s work has been seen in opera houses around the nation. Critics hailed her recent directorial debut at Lyric Opera of Chicago: a "wickedly funny, elegantly sung, cleverly directed production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*." In recent seasons, she created new productions of *The Little Prince* (Utah Opera), *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Wolf Trap Opera), *Il re pastore* (Merola Opera), *Agrippina* (Ars Lyrica Houston), and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Boston Baroque). The 2021-2022 season finds Ms. Faircloth working on several new productions, including *Emmeline* with Tulsa Opera, *La Traviata* at Opera Santa Barbara and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with The Juilliard School. In addition, she revisits old favorite *The Barber of Seville* in a debut at Dallas Opera. The baroque repertoire is of special interest to Ms. Faircloth, who made her directorial debut with Ars Lyrica Houston's production of *Cain: Il primo omicidio* in 2003, and has since designed and directed a number of shows for the company. She splits her time between Austin and Houston, Texas, where she enjoys restoring her 1935 Craftsman Bungalow.



Matthew Dirst, recently described in the *Washington Post* as an "efficient, extremely precise conductor who has an ear for detail," is the first American musician to win major international prizes in both organ and harpsichord, including the American Guild of Organists National Young Artist Competition and the Warsaw International Harpsichord Competition. Widely admired for his stylish playing and conducting, Dirst leads Ars Lyrica Houston, a period-instrument ensemble with several acclaimed recordings, one of which—J. A. Hasse's *Marc Antonio e Cleopatra*—was nominated for a Grammy Award

in 2011 for Best Opera. His degrees include a PhD in musicology from Stanford University and the *prix de virtuosité* in both organ and harpsichord from the Conservatoire National de Reuil-Malmaison, France, where he spent two years as a Fulbright scholar. Equally active as a scholar and as an organist, Dirst is Professor of Music at the Moores School of Music, University of Houston, and Organist at St. Philip Presbyterian Church in Houston. His publications include *Engaging Bach: The Keyboard Legacy from Marburg to Mendelssohn* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), *Bach and the Organ* (University of Illinois Press, 2016), and *Learned Play: Bach's Art of Fugue and Musical Offering* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2022).



Born in 1959 to architect parents, **Jonathan Dove's** early musical experience came from playing the piano, organ and viola. Later he studied composition with Robin Holloway at Cambridge and, after graduation, worked as a freelance accompanist, répétiteur, animateur and arranger. His early professional experience gave him a deep understanding of singers, with opera and the voice being central priorities in Dove's output throughout his subsequent career. Dove's innate understanding of the individual voice is exemplified in his large and varied choral and song output, and his confident optimism has made him the natural choice as the composer for big occasions. In 2010 *A Song of Joys* for chorus and orchestra opened the festivities at the Last Night of the Proms, and in 2016 an expanded version of *Our Revels Now Are Ended* premiered at the same occasion. Jonathan Dove was made a Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in the Queen's 2019 Birthday Honours for services to music. His music is published by Edition Peters.

ABOUT ARS LYRICA

Founded in 1998 by harpsichordist and conductor Matthew Dirst, Ars Lyrica Houston presents a diverse array of music in its original context while creating connections to contemporary life. Ars Lyrica's acclaimed programming features neglected gems alongside familiar masterworks, and extracts the dramatic potential, emotional resonance, and expressive power of music. Its local subscription series, according to the Houston Chronicle, "sets the agenda" for early music in Houston. Ars Lyrica appears regularly at international festivals and concert series because of its distinctive focus, and its pioneering efforts in the field of authentic performance have won international acclaim, including a Grammy nomination for Best Opera.

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An accomplished composer, violinist, conductor, fencer, and dancer, Joseph de Bologne became the toast of Paris in the early 1770s. The son of a plantation owner and an African slave, the younger mixed-race Bologne acquired the title Chevalier de Saint-Georges thanks to Louis XV, in whose personal guard he briefly served, and eventually became a favorite of Marie Antoinette. With a tuneful violin concerto from Saint-Georges, a comparable work from a contemporary, and a symphony commissioned by the Chevalier, this program transports us to a lively Parisian concert hall in the mid 1780s, just before the Revolution changed everything.

- Joseph de Bologne, Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 3, No. 1
- W. A. Mozart, Violin Concerto No. 3 in G Major, K. 216
- Joseph Haydn, "Paris" Symphony No. 83 in G Minor ("The Hen")

Matthew Dirst
conductor

SUNDAY
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**Elizabeth
Blumenstock**
violin



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Roberts**
violin^o

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