MusicNOW PRESENTS WORLD PREMIERE OF CHICAGO-AREA NATIVE AMY BETH KIRSTEN’S SAVIOR

Evening-Length Vocal and Instrumental Theater Work Takes Inspiration from the Life of Legendary Heroine Joan of Arc

Monday, April 2, at 7 p.m., at the Harris Theater

CHICAGO—The third program of the 2017/18 season of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s acclaimed MusicNOW series takes place on Monday, April 2, at 7 p.m., at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance in Millennium Park (205 E. Randolph, Chicago). The CSO’s contemporary music series continues its 20th season with the world premiere of Amy Beth Kirsten’s Savior, which was commissioned by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation for MusicNOW. This evening-length work of composed theater features a collaboration between musicians of the CSO and guest artists from Kirsten’s New Haven, Conn.-based HOWL ensemble. CSO Mead Composers-in-Residence Samuel Adams and Elizabeth Ogonek host the April 2 program.

Savior is a composed-theatrical telling of the life and death of the legendary heroine Joan of Arc in 15th-century France. This 65-minute work integrates light, movement, text and sound design to reflect upon the perceptual richness and complexity of Joan of Arc’s mystical and divinely inspired life, as well as her politically motivated death on the stake.

The work is scored for flute, cello, percussion, three women’s voices and one pre-recorded voice. Directed by Kirsten, this production features Timothy Munro, alto flute; Katinka Kleijn, CSO cello; Cynthia Yeh, CSO principal percussion; Molly Netter and Eliza Bagg, sopranos; Hai-Ting Chinn, mezzo-soprano; Sandy Smillie, pre-recorded voice; Mary Ellen Stebbins, lighting design; Christopher Kriz, sound design; Denise Musilova, movement; and Christina Lorraine Bullard, mask design. In addition to composing the score, Kirsten wrote the libretto, which was inspired by the documented testimony of Joan of Arc and her witnesses and features the 19th-century poem Les Roses de Saadi by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore.
Kirsten uses the various sounds of the ensemble to represent characters in the story. Joan is represented by the three women’s voices, especially the first soprano. The flutist, who wears a stag mask throughout the performance, and the mezzo-soprano represent the embodiment of Joan’s divine voices. A pre-recorded male voice represents a chronicler at the trial, and the trial interrogators are the instrumentalists, who at times vocalize in addition to playing their instruments.

Kirsten utilizes timbre and rhythm as core parts of her compositions, and Savior is no exception. This work conveys reflection, especially with the trio of vocal soloists who recall Joan’s childhood in their a cappella choral singing of Les Roses de Saadi. Drama, intimacy and intensity are added with percussive rhythms and vocalized sounds that are at times whispered and delineated with a nasal quality.

“Savior is our most ambitious project to date,” said CSO Mead Composers-in-Residence Samuel Adams and Elizabeth Ogonek. “We have been working to commission a work by Amy Beth Kirsten since we began our residency, and it’s tremendously exciting to see her striking vision gradually come to life as part of our 20th-anniversary programming.”

Kirsten said, “I’m deeply grateful to Samuel Adams, Elizabeth Ogonek, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation for making this collaboration between the musicians of the CSO and HOWL possible. It’s been a dream come true to return home to Chicago and work with these talented people—and to be a part of the celebration of 20 years of MusicNOW.”

Recognized with artist fellowships from the John S. Guggenheim Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, Amy Beth Kirsten’s musical and conceptual language is characterized by an abiding interest in exploring theatrical elements of creation, performance and presentation. Her body of work fuses music, language, voice and theater, and often considers musicians’ instruments, bodies and voices as equal vehicles of expression. Kirsten has created evening-length, fully-staged composed theater works as well as traditional concert works for her own ensemble HOWL, the New World Symphony, Peak Performances, the multi-Grammy-winning eighth blackbird and American Composers Orchestra, among many others. She earned a master’s degree in music from Roosevelt University and a doctorate in composition from the Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins University. Kirsten teaches privately at the HighSCORE summer festival in Pavia, Italy. She joined the composition faculty of the Longy School of Music at Bard College in fall 2017.

Co-founded in 2012 by Kirsten and Lindsay Kesselman, HOWL ensemble is a performing arts company that fuses theatrical, operatic and chamber music forms, placing the musicians at the center of the action. HOWL is dedicated to the development and performance of new, unclassifiable works that combine the imaginations of creators across arts disciplines. Last season HOWL ensemble collaborated with Montclair State University to present the world premiere of Quixote, another composed theater work by Kirsten, which The New York Times described as “wildly inventive.”

Prior to the concert, CSO Mead Composers-in-Residence Samuel Adams and Elizabeth Ogonek host a preconcert talk with composer Amy Beth Kirsten. This event, held at 6 p.m. at the Harris Theater in Lobby Level 1, is free and open to all MusicNOW ticket-holders.
MusicNOW’s partnership with the Chicago-based collaborative design practice Thirst continues in the 2017/18 season. Inspired by the music on each of the four MusicNOW programs, Thirst artist John Pobojejewski creates an original artwork for each program that is available as a complimentary commemorative poster for up to 150 audience members at each performance, while supplies last.

Pobojejewski said, “This poster for Amy Beth Kirsten’s operetta features a single glass rose standing ablaze, inspired by iconography associated with the famous martyr. Text from Amy Beth Kirsten’s libretto is overlaid in digital holographic foil—fear this creature in the form of a woman.”

Each MusicNOW concert includes an opportunity to meet with the musicians and composers in an informal setting during post-concert receptions with complimentary food and beverages.

Amy Beth Kirsten’s Savior is commissioned by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation for MusicNOW.

Major support for MusicNOW is generously provided by the Irving Harris Foundation, the Sally Mead Hands Foundation, the Julian Family Foundation, Cindy Sargent and the Zell Family Foundation. MusicNOW media sponsors are WBEZ 91.5FM and Time Out Chicago.

Special thanks to Helen Meyer Sound for graciously donating sound equipment support for MusicNOW.

Tickets for all MusicNOW concerts can be purchased by phone at 800-223-7114 or 312-294-3000, online at cso.org or at the Symphony Center box office: 220 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60604.

Artists, programs and prices are subject to change.

# # #

**Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

**MusicNOW**

Harris Theater for Music and Dance
205 E. Randolph, Chicago

---

**Monday, April 2, 7 p.m.**

- **Musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra**
- **HOWL vocal theatre ensemble and creative team**
- **Samuel Adams**, Mead Composer-in-Residence
- **Elizabeth Ogonek**, Mead Composer-in-Residence
- **Molly Netter**, soprano
- **Eliza Bagg**, soprano
- **Hai-Ting Chinn**, mezzo-soprano
- **Sandy Smillie**, pre-recorded voice
- **Timothy Munro**, alto flute
- **Katinka Kleijn**, cello
- **Cynthia Yeh**, percussion
- **Mary Ellen Stebbins**, lighting design
- **Christopher Kriz**, sound design
- **Denisa Musilova**, movement
- **Christina Lorraine Bullard**, mask design
CSO Mead Composers-in-Residence:
Samuel Adams
Elizabeth Ogonek

Featured Composer for this Program:
Amy Beth Kirsten, composer, librettist, director

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra: www.cso.org and www.csosoundsandstories.org
Founded in 1891, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is consistently hailed as one of the greatest orchestras in the world. Since 2010, the pre-eminent conductor Riccardo Muti has served as its 10th music director. Yo-Yo Ma is the CSO’s Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant, and Samuel Adams and Elizabeth Ogonek are its Mead Composers-in-Residence.

From baroque through contemporary music, the CSO commands a vast repertoire. Its renowned musicians annually perform more than 150 concerts, most at Symphony Center in Chicago and, each summer, at the suburban Ravinia Festival. They regularly tour nationally and internationally. Since 1892, the CSO has made 60 international tours, performing in 29 countries on five continents.

People around the globe listen to weekly radio broadcasts of CSO concerts and recordings on the WFMT radio network and online at cso.org/radio. Recordings by the CSO have earned 62 Grammy Awards, including two in 2011 for Muti’s recording with the CSO and Chorus of Verdi’s Messa da Requiem (Muti’s first of eight releases with the CSO to date). Find details on these and many other CSO recordings at www.cso.org/resound.

The CSO is part of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association, which also includes the Chicago Symphony Chorus (Duain Wolfe, Director and Conductor) and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, a training ensemble for emerging professionals. Through its prestigious Symphony Center Presents series, the CSOA presents guest artists and ensembles from a variety of genres—classical, jazz, world, and contemporary.

The Negaunee Music Institute at the CSO offers community and education programs that annually engage more than 200,000 people of diverse ages and backgrounds. Through the Institute and other activities, including a free annual concert led by Muti, the CSO is committed to using the power of music to create connections and build community.

The CSO is supported by thousands of patrons, volunteers and institutional and individual donors. The CSO’s music director position is endowed in perpetuity by a generous gift from the Zell Family Foundation. The Negaunee Foundation provides generous support in perpetuity for the work of the Negaunee Music Institute.