

LIFE'S WORK: SONGS OF AMERICAN COMPOSERS

*An evening with Phillip Cheah, Trudy Chan, Re'ut Ben Ze'ev, Margaret Kampmeier,
José Pietri-Coimbre, Richard Liebowitz, and Halie Morris*

Monday, April 22, 2019 7:30 pm Marc A. Scorca Hall; National Opera Center/ NYC

Phillip Cheah, voice
Trudy Chan, piano
Life's Work, Part I

H. Leslie Adams

From *Nightsongs* - Prayer (Langston Hughes)

Chester Biscardi

From *Modern Love Songs* -

What a Coincidence (William Zinsser)

Frank J. Oteri

From *Love Games and Illusions* -

Peruse Me (Lady Mary Wroth)

Dennis Tobenski

This Glass (Richard Barnfield)

H. Leslie Adams

From *Five Millay Songs* - For You There Is

No Song (Edna St. Vincent Millay)

Rosephanye Powell

From *Miss Wheatley's Garden* - I Want to Die

While You Love Me (Georgia Douglas Johnson)

Re'ut Ben Ze'ev, Mezzo-Soprano

Margaret Kampmeier, piano

Music of Vally Weigl

Toccatina for solo piano

All Day I Hear the Noise of Waters (James
Joyce)

Oh, Lord of Mysteries

i. My Life Closed Twice (Emily Dickinson)

ii. Death Psalm (Denise Levertov)

From *Songs of Concern*:

Who Is At My Window (Denise Levertov)

Weigl, continued

Two songs From *Take My Hand* (Edith Segal)

i. Other Hearts

ii. Other Summers

From *Native Island* - Lullaby (Gerta Kennedy)

***** (short intermission)

José Pietri-Coimbre, Baritone

Richard Liebowitz, piano; Halie Morris, cello

Music of Dorothy Rudd Moore

Weary Blues (Langston Hughes)

Fourth of July Speech -

from *Frederick Douglass* opera (Moore)

Phillip Cheah, voice

Trudy Chan, piano

Life's Work, Part II

Loretta Notareschi

Two selections from *Love Songs* -

i. as is the sea (e.e. cummings)

ii. there is a moon (e.e. cummings)

Chester Biscardi

From *Modern Love Songs* -

At Any Given Moment (Zinsser)

Karen Siegel

From *On Beauty* -

On Beauty, After Confucius (Siegel)

Mark Fax

From *The Cardoza Songs* - Love (Jo Ann Harris)

Steve Holtje

from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (T.S. Eliot)

Joseph N. Rubinstein

Life's Work (Melisa Tien)

COMPOSERS - NOTES

The opening and closing sets on tonight's program feature the Cheah Chan Duo (CCD) in a wide variety of American art songs composed during the last six decades. The duo have named these sets, "Life's Work" (which subsequently became the overall name for tonight's entire program) after the title of the final song they will present during this performance; it is an apt moniker for this collection of poignant vignettes about various personal experiences.

The first set opens with "Prayer," a stunningly beautiful 1961 setting of a brief but poignant poem by Langston Hughes (1901-1967) about self doubt by the African American neo-romantic composer **H. Leslie Adams** (from his cycle *Nightsongs*, which has been one of the American Composers Alliance's most popular sheet music collections). Winner of the 2015 Cleveland Arts Prize Lifetime Achievement Award, the 86-years-young Adams remains extremely active. "What a Coincidence," a 1997 song celebrating new found love, features music by **Chester Biscardi** and words by William Zinsser; it is the opening of their song cycle *Modern Love Songs* (1997-2002) which evolved out of their shared passion for the American Songbook. Biscardi, whose idiomatic text settings come from a lifetime of being immersed in music and literature (he has degrees in both fields), has been a member of the Music Faculty at Sarah Lawrence College since 1977, serving as the Music Director from 1987 to 2017. "Peruse Me," is a setting by another music and literature obsessed composer, **Frank J. Oteri**, of an extremely intense love poem by the earliest published female sonneteer in the English language, Lady Mary Wroth (1587-1651 or 53), though not a sonnet, which CCD premiered on March 26, 2019, a week after Oteri composed it. Oteri plans for it to be part of a cycle of nine Wroth settings entitled *Love Games and Illusions* for soloists, treble chorus, and ensemble, expanding on the three choral settings commissioned from Oteri by the Young People's Chorus of New York City in 2014.

Dennis Tobenski's "This Glass," which CCD premiered on June 24, 2016, is also a setting of an Renaissance English love poem, this one by Richard Barnfield (1574-1620), the only other Elizabethan male poet besides William Shakespeare who addressed love poems to another man which survive. It is an ideal text for Tobenski, a composer and tenor based in New York City, whose deeply lyrical music is frequently inspired by gay themes. **H. Leslie Adams** makes a second appearance with his 1961 "For You There is No Song," a setting of a lovelorn poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950); it is part of Adams's cycle *Five Millay Songs*. The first set concludes with the rapturous "I Want to Die While You Love Me," a setting of a poem by Harlem Renaissance author Georgia Douglas Johnson (1880-1966) by **Rosephanye Powell** from her cycle *Miss Wheatley's Garden*. Powell, who was born in Alabama and currently teaches at Auburn University, is a prolific composer of solo vocal and choral works, both sacred and secular, which are frequently inspired by African-American musical traditions.

The Cheah Chan Duo's second set opens with two selections from *Love Songs*, a 1999 collection of four settings of poems by the idiosyncratic American modernist E. E. Cummings (1894-1962) by **Loretta Notareschi**. Currently based in Denver, Colorado, where she serves as an associate professor of music at Regis University, Notareschi composes works in a wide variety of musical idioms including *String Quartet OCD* which was performed on a TedxMileHigh Talk. "On Beauty, After Confucius"

featuring music and words (derived from the ancient Chinese philosopher Kong Fuzi) by **Karen Siegel** is the third and final movement of Siegel's cycle *On Beauty*, which was commissioned by CCD and premiered by them on March 26, 2019. Siegel, a composer, soprano, and conductor based in New Jersey, is a founding member of C4: the Choral Composer/Conductor Collective (as is Phillip Cheah). "Love," a setting of a poem by Jo Ann Harris, is the only song CCD is performing tonight which was written by a composer who is no longer with us, **Mark Fax** (1911-1974), and was published posthumously as part of the cycle *The Cardoza Songs*. A Baltimore born and raised child prodigy, Fax later in life served as the director of the School of Music at Howard University, America's earliest chartered black university, and his 1967 opera *'Til Victory is Won* was staged at the Kennedy Center shortly before his death.

Steve Holtje's enigmatic "from The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a setting of a passage from the famous poem by T. S. Eliot which was given its first public concert performance by CCD on May 22, 2016. Brooklyn based composer and music journalist Steve Holtje has also composed several sparse but otherworldly settings of haiku which CCD have premiered on their recitals. The final song of tonight's program is "Life's Work," another work commissioned by CCD and premiered by them on March 26, 2019. It is a collaboration between composer **Joseph N. Rubinstein** and playwright/lyricist Melisa Tien, both based in New York City, who have also worked together on the 2018 song cycle *Daylight Savings*. Tien's musings on a long-term relationship which Rubinstein enhances through lush figurations and vibrant harmonies is the perfect way to end this evening of snapshots of lives and loves through song.

—Frank J. Oteri (April 20, 2019)

New York City-based composer and music journalist Frank J. Oteri is the Composer Advocate at New Music USA where he is also the Co-Editor of NewMusicBox, which has edited since its inception in 1999. He also serves on the Executive Committee for the International Society of Contemporary Music (ISCM).

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Dorothy Rudd Moore (b. 1940) Considered one of her generation's leading women composers, Dorothy Rudd Moore has received commissions from the National Symphony, Opera Ebony, and the Buffalo Philharmonic. Her works include chamber music, song cycles, orchestral music, and an opera, and are admired for their high level of artistry and technique. She graduated from Howard University in 1963 where she studied with Dean Warner Lawson, Thomas Kerr, and Mark Fax. She received the Lucy Moten Fellowship to study in France with Nadia Boulanger in 1963. She studied with Chou Wen-Chung in New York in 1965 and in 1968 she became a co-founder of the Society of Black Composers in New York City. Her works have been performed throughout the United States as well as in Europe and Asia. *Dirge and Deliverance*, and *Songs from the Dark Tower* were first released on LP in 1981. The world premiere of her opera, *Frederick Douglass*, with libretto by the composer, took place in New York City in 1985. *The New York Times* called it "an ambitious and important work by a composer of great gifts" (Tim Page, June 30, 1985). Ms. Moore collaborated with her husband, cellist and conductor Kermit Moore (1929-2013), composing solo and chamber works for cello. Her various settings of poetry include Harlem Renaissance writers and The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Langston Hughes' poem *The Weary Blues* was first published by Knopf in 1926.

Vally [Valerie] Weigl [née Pick] (1894–1982), studied piano (Richard Robert), composition (Karl Weigl), and musicology (Guido Adler) at the University of Vienna, after which she worked as a musical assistant at the Musikwissenschaftliches Institut of the University. She married composer Karl Weigl in 1921. After laws went into effect causing the annexation of Austria to Germany, Vally and Karl Weigl were forced to emigrate. They acquired the necessary U.S. affidavits through Irena Wiley, the wife of the U.S. general consul, and Ira Hirschmann, an American businessman and founder of New Friends of Music in New York. With the additional help of the Quakers, they managed to leave with their son via Switzerland and reached New York in October 1938. They were granted U.S. citizenship in 1943.

Mrs. Weigl worked in New York City as a teacher and composer, and later in life, after completing a masters degree at Columbia University, she became chief music therapist at New York Medical College, and authored many journal articles in the field of music therapy. She received a number of prizes and awards, among them from the American Composers Alliance and the Mark Rothko Foundation, as well as a 1976 fellowship grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her catalog of music became more active outside the U.S. in part due to an international symposium in Vienna in May 2001, sponsored in part by the Orpheus Trust. Her music has been widely performed in recent years by performers and ensembles in Germany and Austria. ACA is grateful to be involved in a rekindling of interest in this composer in the U.S. through the efforts of the ACA Score Collection at Special Collections in Performing Arts at the University of Maryland (SCPA) and artists such as Re’ut Ben Ze’ev and Peggy Kampmeier. Many of Vally Weigl’s works express her strong love of nature. Others are strongly influenced by her engagement with pacifism. Her songs on this concert include settings of poetry by Edith Segal, a dancer and teacher at the progressive Jewish Camp Kinderland, whose writings were praised by Langston Hughes.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Now in its milestone tenth season, **Cheah Chan Duo** has become a mainstay of the New York musical scene with performances at The National Opera Center, The DiMenna Center for Classical Music, Tenri Cultural Institute, Cornelia Street Café, North of History, Spectrum NYC, the Church of St. Luke in the Fields, St. Bartholomew’s Church, and Symphony Space. Lauded by Time Out New York for its “restlessly inquisitive” performances, the Duo has garnered acclaim for its uniquely curated programs of art songs and piano works on socio-cultural themes. A strong advocate for new and rarely performed music with several world and US premières, the Duo’s notable performances have included a retrospective recital at the historic Victoria Theatre in Singapore; a featured performance at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia as part of the 1917: How One Year Changed the World exhibition; a 90th birthday tribute concert to Ned Rorem with the composer in the audience; an evening devoted to the music of Frank J. Oteri, featuring the world première of the ASCAP Foundation Charles Kingsford Fund commissioned song cycle Versions of the Truth composed expressly for the Duo; the commemorations of the centenaries of the First World War and Armistice Day; a literary-themed concert for National Poetry Month; two celebrations of Pride Week with LGBT composers and poets; a Lunar New Year concert exploring Chinese composers and their influences; a celebration of Juneteenth with an all-African American program; and a Time Out New York-featured program of British art songs. The Duo can be heard on The Persistence of Song, an upcoming recording of art songs by Jonathan David on the Centaur label with their commissioned work Two Kingsongs.

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Hailed by The New York Times for his “particularly potent contribution”, **Phillip Cheah** maintains an active professional life as a conductor, vocalist, pianist, and teacher. His singing has been noted for its “warm tone and stately presence” (parterre box) with a unique three-and-a-half octave vocal range that “defies the laws of nature” (Time Out New York). He is a member of the professional choir at the Church of St. Luke in the Fields and sang for many seasons with the renowned Bach Vespers Choir at Holy Trinity Church. He has performed at Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Madison Square Garden, Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue, Trinity Church Wall Street, the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, Saint Bartholomew’s Church, and Temple Emanu-El with major ensembles like the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and American Symphony Orchestra, and artists including Lorin Maazel, Riccardo Muti, Kurt Masur, Jane Glover, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Gustavo Dudamel, John Scott, Sir Paul McCartney, Olympia Dukakis, Ramin Djawadi, YEBBA, and Madonna. He has appeared as a soloist with the Church of St. Luke in the Fields, The Glass Menagerie, Crescent Choral Society, Vertical Repertory Players, and the Canby Singers. He can be heard on the Pro Organo, Tzadik, and MSR Classics recording labels. Praised by *The New York Times* for the “warm tone and carefully calibrated blend” elicited from his choirs, Cheah is the Music Director of Central City Chorus and Amuse Singers as well as a founding member of the New York-based new music chorus, C4: The Choral Composer-Conductor Collective.

He has conducted REBEL Baroque Orchestra, the Adelphi Orchestra, New Music New York, Cerddorion Vocal Ensemble, and various New York Summer Sings hosted by the New York Choral Society, the West Village Chorale, St. George’s Choral Society, and the New York Choral Consortium. Equally at home with opera and musical theater, he was the assistant conductor and répétiteur at the venerable Amato Opera for three seasons and he has served as the music director for productions at The Brearley School, Acting Manitou, Dwight-Englewood School, Bloomington Music Works, and the 13th Street Repertory Company. Cheah holds both B.S. and M.M. degrees from Indiana University Jacob School of Music in piano performance, choral conducting, and opera coaching. In addition to studying at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien under the auspices of the Institut für Europäische Studien, he was also a recipient of the 2002 National Endowment for Humanities Grant to study the German operas of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in Vienna, Austria.

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Since moving to New York City from Hong Kong in 2002, **Trudy Tong Ti Chan**, has performed solo piano and chamber works as part of the Annual ASCAP Deems Taylor Awards Ceremonies at Lincoln Center, was harpsichordist for an all-Telemann concert at St. Peter’s Church as well as a day-long re-interpretation of Eric Satie’s Vexations at Long Island City’s Sculpture Center, and also served as one of two pianists for Central City Chorus’s performances of Brahms’s Liebeslieder Waltzes and German Requiem. Cheah Chan Duo, which she formed with vocalist Phillip Cheah in 2009, has performed at various venues in New York City such as the Church of St. Luke in the Fields, the Chapel at St. Bart’s, National Opera Center, The DiMenna Center for Performing Arts, Tenri Cultural Institute, North of History, the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, and at the Victoria Theatre in Singapore. Back in Hong Kong, Trudy was staff accompanist for the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and performed with the Hong Kong Sinfonietta as well as for Radio/TV HK. She additionally spent five summers performing at Italy’s Orvieto Musica Festival. When she is not performing, Trudy runs her boutique company, Black Tea Music, working with composers and new music performing artists.

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Israeli-American performer, **Re'ut Ben-Ze'ev** has been gaining international recognition for her "...bold, committed [and] deeply physical performance" (The New York Times). She recently performed with members of the Berlin and Munich Philharmonic Berio's FOLK SONGS to a rave review, stating she "performed magic" (Augsburger-Allgemeine.) Her voice has been featured on the Soundtrack of Natalie Portman's directorial debut film A TALE OF LOVE AND DARKNESS, selected for a special screening at the Cannes Film Festival. The Soundtrack, by Oscar-nominated composer Nicholas Britell was released on Warner Brothers' Milan Records. In recent highlights, Re'ut Re'ut appeared with Grammy winner composer Frank London in his Folk-Opera A NIGHT IN THE OLD MARKETPLACE, created a staged version of Schumann's FRAEUENLIEBE UND LEBEN with Marc Peloquin and toured Israel with rare Yiddish operetta arias and theater songs with Zalmen Mlotek, artistic director of the Folksbiene. Re'ut has appeared internationally in venues such as Lincoln Center, Spoleto Festival, The American Academy in Berlin, Jerusalem Music Centre, Israel Vocal Arts Institute, WQXR, PBS webcast, and recorded for Naxos, Albany Records, Delos Records and others.

A champion of new music, she collaborated with numerous composers as Pulitzer Prize winners David Del Tredici and Yehudi Wyner, as well as Samuel Adler, Dalit Warshaw and conductors as Leonard Slatkin, Grammy Award Winner Lucas Richman, KarlHeinz Steffens, David Randolph and others. Highlights of upcoming projects include an international tour in collaboration with the Israel Composers' League, weaving together works by Kurt Weill with newly commissioned contemporary compositions, lecture-concerts with Zalmen Mlotek, creating the role of sculpture Jessie Lipscomb in Dalit Warshaw's opera CAMILLE CLAUDEL, creating performer of THE CAGE FILES in collaboration with composer-clarinetist Vasko Dukovski, as well as premiering vocal-chamber works by mid 20th century composer Vally Weigl and her women contemporaries with players of the New York Philharmonic.

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Pianist **Margaret Kampmeier** enjoys a varied career as soloist, collaborative artist and educator. Equally fluent in classical and contemporary repertoire, she has concertized and recorded extensively. Ms. Kampmeier has performed with the St. Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic Ensembles, Kronos Quartet, Sherman Chamber Ensemble, Richardson Chamber Players, and Mirror Visions Ensemble. As orchestral keyboardist, she performs regularly with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, and is a frequent guest of the New York Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, and Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra. As a recording artist, Ms. Kampmeier can be heard on the Albany, Centaur, CRI, Koch, Nonesuch, and Bridge labels. Ms. Kampmeier teaches piano and chamber music at Princeton University, and is Chair and Artistic Director of the Contemporary Performance Program at the Manhattan School of Music. She earned degrees from the Eastman School of Music and SUNY Stony Brook, and is deeply grateful to her mentors Barry Snyder, Jan Degaetani, Julius Levine, and Gilbert Kalish. In addition to her professional activities, Ms. Kampmeier is an avid reader, and enjoys traveling and spending time with her family. A native of Rochester, NY, she resides currently in New York City.

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Puerto-Rican born **José Pietri-Coimbre** has distinguished himself as a classical baritone soloist and ensemble singer, an additionally as an orchestral, chamber music, and solo violinist and violist. As a vocalist, Mr. Pietri-Coimbre has presented solo art song recitals in the United States and Europe. He has appeared in recent years as soloist with the S.E.M. Ensemble, Early Music New York, Music at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian, and Master Voices with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, among others. Operatic roles include include: Giove (La Calisto), Oreste/Besso (Il Giasone), and in scenes from Le Ballade Mascarade, Figaro (Nozze di Figaro),

Papageno (Die Zauberflöte), Leporello (Don Giovanni), Pandolfe (Cendrillon), Dr. Falke (Die Fledermaus), Walter White/Heisenberg (Breaking Bad-Ozymandias), and Dancairo (Carmen). He was a member of the Puerto Rico Opera Chorus and was a frequent oratorio soloist in the Island. Mr. Pietri-Coimbre also sings regularly with Musica Sacra, Bard Festival Singers the Choir of St. Ignatius Loyola, among others. Mr. Pietri-Coimbre also keeps a busy schedule as a freelance violinist and violist in the New York Metro area, and additionally as a passionate educator.

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Well-versed in a variety of musical styles, cellist **Halie Morris** is a vital presence in the artistic communities of New York City and North Carolina. In recent years, she has performed with the North Carolina Symphony, the North Carolina Opera, Carolina Ballet, the Carolina Philharmonic, the Fayetteville Symphony, Opera on the James, the Richmond Symphony, the Blue Hill Troupe, and other prominent ensembles. In 2015, she made her television debut as a member of the “New York Symphony” on Amazon’s Mozart in the Jungle series. She received a Bachelor of Musical Arts along with a Bachelor of Arts in Hispanic Studies from Oberlin College in 2008, and completed her Masters Degree in Music at Northwestern University in 2010. Her principal teachers were Hans Jensen, Amir Eldan, and Martha Gerschefski-Schaum.

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Richard Liebowitz is an active member of New York's music community, performing as both pianist and vocalist. He is a graduate of London’s Royal College of Music, Syracuse University, and the Juilliard Pre-College Division. He resides in New York City and works at WQXR, the country’s leading radio station for classical music.

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