



QUEER URBAN ORCHESTRA
presents

WE WERE TOGETHER. I FORGET THE REST.

feat. the Empire City Men's Chorus

Saturday, May 11, 2024 • 8:00 p.m.
Church of the Holy Apostles • 296 9th Ave.
David Bloom, Artistic Director
QueerUrbanOrchestra.org

From the Artistic Director

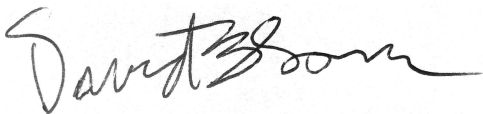
Welcome, friends!

“Day by day and night by night we were together,” wrote Walt Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*, “all else has long been forgotten by me.” Whitman inspired not only the title of tonight’s concert, but also our featured composer Jeffrey Parola, whose new work (performed tonight for the first time ever) is a setting of Whitman texts that remained unpublished during the poet’s lifetime, perhaps suppressed because of their overt homosexuality. The piece includes the line: “I dreamed there was a city of robust friends—nothing was greater there than manly love,” which immediately recalls the final lines of another work featured tonight by Johannes Brahms: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

With the exception of Brahms, all of tonight’s featured composers are or were queer, including the late Conrad Susa, whose choral/orchestral vision of Brahms’ music unleashes the inherent glory of the songs. Viet Cuong’s *Deciduous* reminds us that, in the wake of loss, the promise of new life remains. This March, the same Russian government that has attempted to coverup Tchaikovsky’s homosexuality added what they call the “LGBT movement” to their list of extremist and terrorist organizations. Premiered 131 years ago, the once quiet protest of the *Pathétique* Symphony rings loud and clear today.

All of us at QUO are thrilled to welcome our wonderful partners, Empire City Men’s Chorus, founded 30 years ago as Gay Gotham Chorus. As we look forward to our own 15th anniversary, we are deeply inspired by their work and are honored to share the stage with them tonight and at their upcoming anniversary concerts May 31 and June 2! ECMC Artistic Director Vince Peterson and I are as tight-knit as chosen family gets, and it’s such a joy for me to introduce my beloved family at QUO to his boundless creativity and love.

Lots of love,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David Bloom". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.



David Bloom is a conductor equally at home in orchestral repertoire, opera, and new music, noted for his “dazzling precision and grace” (*San Francisco Chronicle*), “intelligence, elegance, and passion” (*Opera News*), “ferocious and focused” (*The New York Times*) performances, and “breathtaking and inspired programming” (*Shepherd*

Express). He dedicates his work to collaborating with artists and communities to inspire creativity, empathy, and joy.

He is Co-Artistic Director of Contemporaneous, a 23-member New York-based ensemble he co-founded in 2010, and has been Co-Artistic Director of Present Music, Milwaukee’s long-running new music ensemble, since 2019. In 2023, he became Artistic Director of New York’s Queer Urban Orchestra and Principal Conductor of the orchestras at New York University, where he also teaches conducting.

In such venues as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, MoMA, and Park Avenue Armory, Bloom has guest conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, Bang on a Can All-Stars, Jacaranda, The Crossing, Ensemble Connect, Choir of Trinity Wall Street, and Kronos Quartet, among others, and worked with soloists Dashon Burton, David Byrne, Helga Davis, Isabel Leonard, Iarla Ó Lionáird, Courtney Love, Hila Plitmann, and Dawn Upshaw. Especially active as an opera conductor, Bloom has led productions for Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha, Beth Morrison Projects, Tri-Cities Opera, PROTOTYPE Festival, Teatro Grattacielo, Experiments in Opera, the American Opera Project, and more. In 2023, he conducted the premiere of Dylan Mattingly’s six-hour opera *Stranger Love* at Walt Disney Concert Hall, directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz.

He has conducted over 450 world premieres and collaborated with such composers as Donnacha Dennehy, Du Yun, inti figgis-vizueta, Michael Gordon, Judd Greenstein, Nathalie Joachim, David Lang, Tania León, Emma O’Halloran, and Julia Wolfe. In 2021, he conducted Present Music in the world premiere of Raven Chacon’s *Voiceless Mass*, which went on to win the 2022 Pulitzer Prize. davidbloomconductor.com



Musician/Educator/Wearer-of-Many-Hats
Derek J. Weagle (*they/them*) is a Brooklyn-based artist and healer invested in the disruption of social and academic barriers around classical music, as well as the preservation of music-making as an act of joyful humanness. With a practice rooted in syncretism, Derek can be found equally comfortable in roles ranging from conductor to composer, performer to teacher.

They hold a B.M. in Music Education from UMass Lowell and an M.M. in Composition with a minor in Choral Conducting from New England

Conservatory, as well as a Certificate in Sound Healing from the Sage Academy of Sound in Woodstock, NY. Current engagements include work as an independent Sound Healing Practitioner, Associate Conductor of the Queer Urban Orchestra, Artistic Director of the Adelphi University Vocal Ensemble, Founding Artistic Director of Bloom Sound Collective, Composer & Owner at Risanare Music, Board of Directors for the Refugee Orchestra Project.

Their work as a composer has received recognition both nationally and internationally, including the American Prize in Composition, the International Horn Society, and the International Composition Competition Harelbeke. For more information on Derek's artistic practice and services offered, see their website at www.derekjweagle.com.

QUO Board of Directors & Staff

David Lohman, President

James DiMeglio, Vice-President

Bob Wei, Secretary

Scott Oaks, Treasurer

Lynn Caron, Navin Manglani, Ron Nahass, Mason Pilevsky,

Cory Pitts, Dustin Zuelke - Members at Large

Brian Shaw, Orchestra Manager

Nick Johnson, Orchestra Librarian



Vince Peterson is widely recognized as an influential voice in American choral music. He founded the groundbreaking vocal ensemble Choral Chameleon in 2008, revolutionizing choral concert programming and interdisciplinary approaches. His influence is evidenced by nearly 300 premieres of new choral and theater music over fifteen years, earning him critical acclaim from major publications like The New York Times and

Gramophone Magazine, as well as the ASCAP/Chorus America Award for Adventurous Programming.

Since 2014, Peterson has also served as the Artistic Director of the Empire City Men's Chorus, leading it through its 25th Anniversary Season. His compositions and arrangements are widely performed across the U.S., with seven of his works commissioned by the Grammy® Award-winning ensemble Chanticleer, attracting over a million views on YouTube.

Dr. Peterson's work has been presented in major venues around the world including Carnegie Hall, Chicago Symphony Hall, and Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco. As a collaborative pianist and organist, he has toured extensively, including a notable performance at St. Peter's Basilica for Pope John Paul II at age fifteen.

He holds a BMus from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and a Double MM from Mannes College of Music, and a DMA in Choral Music from Shenandoah University where he wrote his dissertation on the music of his longtime mentor and teacher, Conrad Susa. Recognized as a thought leader, his impact as a teacher and mentor extends globally, inspiring musicians across six continents. His accolades include the 2018 Louis Botto Award from Chorus America for his visionary and entrepreneurial contributions to choral music.



QUEER URBAN ORCHESTRA

David Bloom, Artistic Director
Derek Weagle, Associate Conductor

Saturday, May 11th, 2024 - 8:00pm

Church of the Holy Apostles, NYC

We were together. I forget the rest.

Deciduous (2023)

Viet Cuong

New York City premiere

Derek Weagle — conductor

Break Forth, Dream (2024)

Jeffrey Parola

world premiere, commissioned by Empire City Men's Chorus

I. *Earth!*

II. *I dreamed*

Empire City Men's Chorus

Vince Peterson — conductor

Vier ernste Gesänge (Four Serious Songs),

Johannes Brahms,

Op. 121 (1896, arr. 1993)

arr. Conrad Susa

New York premiere, orchestral version

I. *Denn es gehet dem Menschen*

(Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals)

II. *Ich wandte mich und sahe*

(Again I looked and saw all the oppression)

III. *O Tod, wie bitter bist du*

(O death, how bitter you are)

IV. *Wenn ich mit Menschen und mit Engelszungen redete*

(Though I speak with the tongues of men, and of the angels)

Empire City Men's Chorus

David Bloom — conductor

— *Intermission* —

Symphony No. 6 in B minor,
Op. 74, “*Pathétique*” (1893)

Piotr Ilych Tchaikovsky

- I. Adagio — Allegro non troppo
- II. Allegro con grazia
- III. Allegro molto vivace
- IV. Adagio lamentoso

David Bloom — conductor

*Please take a moment to silence mobile phones.
As a reminder, recording of any type of tonight's program is strictly prohibited.*



About QUO: The Queer Urban Orchestra

Queer Urban Orchestra (QUO) is the Northeast's only orchestra rooted in the LGBTQ+ community. Celebrating queer artistry from its membership to featured composers and performers, the orchestra promotes equity and empathy. QUO was founded in 2009 as New York City's first orchestra specifically serving the LGBTQ+ community. Since its inaugural concert, the orchestra's membership has grown to 100 musicians, and the group's collaborations with the Danspace Project have resulted in praise from *The New York Times*.

The orchestra has premiered numerous works and has collaborated with Anthony Roth-Costanzo, Ariadne Greif, Ryan Roberts, Andrew Yee, Jasmine Rice LaBeija, Empire City Men's Chorus, Youth Pride Chorus, and Stonewall Chorale. Since 2023, QUO has been led by Artistic Director David Bloom and Associate Conductor Derek Weagle. Previous Artistic Directors have included Ian Shafer, Julie Desbordes, Nolan N Dresden, and Brandyn Metzko.

Violin I

Phong Ta †
Rafael Albertini
Belinda Bauer
Brian Harrington
clover st. hubert
Rebecca Collins
Jordan
Andro Kim
Arielle Lubin
Johann Palo
Thomas Purcell
Nic Salas
Dane Stalcup
Navida Stein
Liz Taub
Roi Trawon
Liann Wadewitz
Shang Young

Violin II

Kevin Tan +*
Christian
Balmaseda-Lucca
Jonathan Balsano
alva bostick
Julia Case
Kevin Chau
Wiqar Farooqi
Peter Fifield
Andre Gillard
Josh Li
mel martini
CoryAnn Pitts
Holly Melissa
Seefeldt
Jessica Waddell
Bob Wei

Viola

Noah Green*
James Di Meglio +
Karishma Gottfried
Andy Holland
Marion Lederer
Michael H. Lee
Hilton Marcus
JohnMark Ofrasio
Mason Pilevsky
Nicholas Singletary
Jacob Szilagi
Nathan Threlkeld
Dustin Zuelke

Cello

Bjorn Berkhout*
Navin Manglani+
Rogerio Shieh-
Barbosa
Alex Humesky
Nicholas Saunders
michael shattner
Michael Viljoen
Penglong Zhu

Bass

Jared Chamoff +*
Andrew Op't Hof
Christian Palomares
Hirokazu Yokoyama

Piccolo

Scott Oaks

Flute

Craig Devereaux +*
Hannah Donnelly
Scott Oaks
Aero Roper

Oboe

Matthew Hadley +*
Heath Koch
Brian Shaw
Christian Smythe

English Horn

Christian Smythe

Clarinet

Fran Novak *
Daniel Olson +
Chase Hogan
Johann Palo

Bass Clarinet

Chase Hogan

Bassoon

David Lohman +*
Kevin O'Brien

Contrabassoon

Norma Kerlin

Soprano Sax

Steven Albanese

Alto Saxophone

Brett Dolotina

Tenor Saxophone

Matthew Hadley

Baritone Saxophone

Brian Shaw

French Horn

Kyle Walker *

Lynn Caron +

Bryan Jacobowitz

Chris Jones

Lance Lucas

Trumpet

Julia Cohen*

Mitch Gibbs

Ryan Yacos

Trombone

Ryan Gochee *

Nick Denton

Ryan McTernan

Bass Trombone

Alex Arellano +

Euphonium

Nick Denton

Tuba

Adam Rosenberg

Percussion

Andrew Berman +*

alva bostick

Noah Green

Billy Jiang

Álvaro Rodas

Eva Smith

Hannah Webster

Piano

Nolan N Dresden

† - **Concertmaster**

* - **Principal**

+ - **Section Leader**

EMPIRE CITY

MEN'S CHORUS

About Empire City Men's Chorus

Empire City Men's Chorus is a chorus of compassion and courage, we embrace the marginalized, empower the disconnected, and elevate the human spirit through evocative music. As vanguards of men's choral music, we break barriers, challenge norms, and inspire the celebration of every individual, regardless of gender, identity, or orientation.

For over 30 years, ECMC's high quality choral concert programming has brought countless audiences to their feet, made significant contributions to the tradition of men's choral repertoire, and given back to its greater community through volunteer service, profit-sharing, and goodwill performances. ECMC is much more than an avocational men's chorus. It is a tight-knit community that values fraternity, musical excellence, and social justice. Its membership reflects a diverse cross-section of New Yorkers, identifying with multiple racial and ethnic heritages and across the LGBTQ+ community.

TENOR 1

Josaphat Contreras
Kameron Ghanavati

Craig Goodwin-
Ortez de León
Jimmy Johnson

Jeremy Ritz
Matthew Robbins
Amos To

TENOR 2

Julian Baldwin
Bruce Bergquist
Michael Cheffo
Brian Dashew
Daniel Ehrman

Edward Angelo
Enrique
William Garner
Daniel Greller
Jack Kirk

Casey Koh**
Keith Odums
Steve Ostrow
Chris Quach
Peter Yangga

BARITONE

Jonathan Berg
Scott Michael Brown
Steven Cooper
Marshall Gunter
Mark Heflin
Aaron S. Hock

Joshua Joseph
Micah Krajca
Ronald Langedoc
David Lick
David R. Murray

Jacques Pavlenyi
Bill Powell
Joseph Rodriguez
Su-Jan Miguel Sang
Rodriguez
Daniel Weinberg

BASS

Cameron Benson
Rodrigo Bolaños
Brent Capron
Robbie Cowan

Daniel Hogan
John Maderazo
Stephen Milne*
Marshall Taylor

Kent Walker
David Ward
John Wellmann

**Stephen Milne is the Co-Founder of Gay Gotham Chorus (today's ECMC) and Founding CEO Gotham Performing Arts.*

***Casey Koh is a Founding Member of Gay Gotham Chorus*

ECMC Board of Directors & Staff

Rodrigo Ernesto Bolaños, President
Bill Powell, Vice-President
Craig Goodwin-Ortiz de León, Treasurer
Jeremy Ritz, David Ward, Brent Capron, Jonathan Berg,
Liliana de Jesus, Mitchell Foote - Directors

Vince Peterson, Artistic Director
Robbie Cowan, Associate Conductor
Hee Sung Kim, Principal Pianist

About the Music

Viet Cuong: Deciduous (2023)

For a long time after my father passed away, I felt like I had “lost my leaves.” In the ways that leaves harness light to create energy for trees and plants, I felt like I had so little left to harness creatively. Many days I feared those leaves would never grow back. After struggling for months to write, I finally found some healing while creating *Deciduous*. This involved revisiting chord progressions that brought me solace throughout my life and activating them in textures that I have enjoyed exploring in recent years. The piece cycles through these chord progressions, building to a moment where it’s stripped of everything and must find a way to renew itself. While I continue to struggle with this loss, I have come to understand that healing is not as much of a linear process as it is a cyclical journey, where, without fail, every leafless winter is followed by a spring.

— Viet Cuong

The “alluring” (The New York Times), “arresting” (Gramophone), “irresistible” (San Francisco Chronicle), and “exhilarating” (Chicago Tribune) music of Vietnamese-American composer **Viet Cuong** (b. 1990) has been commissioned and performed on six continents by musicians and ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, Eighth Blackbird, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Sō Percussion, Alarm Will Sound, Atlanta Symphony, Sandbox Percussion, Albany Symphony, PRISM Quartet, and Dallas Winds, among many others. Cuong’s music has been featured in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, National Gallery of Art, and Library of Congress, and his works for wind ensemble have amassed several hundreds of performances worldwide.

In his music Cuong enjoys exploring the unexpected and whimsical, and he is often drawn to projects where he can make peculiar combinations and sounds feel enchanting or oddly satisfying. Cuong is the Pacific Symphony’s current Composer-in-Residence, and from 2020-23 was the California Symphony’s Young American Composer-in-Residence. Cuong serves as Assistant Professor of Music Composition and Theory at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he teaches composition, orchestration, and music theory. He holds degrees in music composition from Princeton University (MFA/PhD), the Curtis Institute of Music (Artist Diploma), and the Peabody Conservatory (BM/MM). His mentors include Jennifer Higdon, David Serkin Ludwig, Donnacha Dennehy, Steve Mackey, Dan Trueman, Kevin Puts, and Oscar Bettison.

Jeffrey Parola: Break Forth, Dream (2024)

Walt Whitman composed a set of 12 poems in 1859 called *Live Oak, with Moss*, when Whitman was 40 years old. The poems were not published in his lifetime, as their rather overt homoerotic qualities were not yet socially acceptable in his historical context. Yet, they live on and resonate in the present day for their honesty and nuance. From this collection, I set numbers “XI” and “IX,” which I have titled “Earth!” and “I dreamed,” drawn from the first words of each poem.

Whitman’s homoerotic poetry generally demonstrates the multi-dimensional layers of male sex attraction and expression. They are simultaneously sensual as they are spiritual, physical as they are heartfelt. This is what drew me to these two poems, as they capture the quiet subtleties of the closet, of yearning, melancholy, and even hope and joy.

In the first movement, Whitman compares his love for another man to the explosive energy lying beneath the surface of the earth. He says, “...there is something terrible in you, ready to break forth...” and later when expressing his love for another man, he says, “But toward him there is something fierce and terrible in me.” I knew that feeling acutely as a teenager and young gay man in the closet, feeling the quiet power of my sexuality—and fearing it. In the music I wrote, I tried to express the feeling of that repressed energy attempting to emerge out of every pore of the body. The musical material pushes and pulls, it changes pace and disorients, and it is intended to make the listener feel uneasy and unsure about what is to happen. This music is about instability, but it is also thrilling to think of what would happen if it were to simply let go. Ironically, in the middle section of the first movement, the music takes a gentle, dream-like turn, where it focuses on the phrase, “...for an athlete loves me, and I him.” In this moment, there is a bit of a glimpse of heaven, where love prevails in the mind of the speaker. I wanted this moment to be tender, as my thoughts of a future partner were always tender thoughts. The music returns to its original disposition, as though the speaker woke up, and the movement ends hauntingly on the phrase, “I dare not tell it in words—not even in these songs.” The poem and the music illustrate the pain of the closet, where one is forced to deal with the reality of a repressed life, all the while dreaming of escaping it.

The second movement is a dream, and it is meant to sound like a dream. Here Whitman dreams of *manly love*: “I often saw them, in numbers, walking hand in hand” and, “It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city, and in

all their looks and words.” In the music, I strove to bring in some “reality” into the dream, as there are layers of dissonance and bits that are somewhat unsettled, in order to avoid a saccharine, utopic vision of the future. The choral writing is together-but-separate, as the main thematic material is canonic in nature, in order to illustrate both connection and disconnection. In many ways, we have achieved what Whitman dreamt in this poem in our time, but as we know, it is not perfect. We are human, after all.

Ultimately, my goal in this piece was to write something that would resonate with queer people across of many generations, as Whitman’s 19th century queer poetry resonates with me. Though we have come far, we know there is much more to do, and my composition aspires to express both the good in our present moment and the greater distance we must travel to continue to make it better.

— Jeffrey Parola

Jeffrey Parola is a composer whose works have been commissioned and performed throughout the US, by ensembles such as Indiana University’s NOTUS, Oklahoma State University Singers, Thalea String Quartet, Lyris String Quartet, Pacific Serenades, Atlantic Classical Orchestra, Choral Chameleon, the San Francisco Conservatory Orchestra, and the Ateneo Chamber Singers. Notable honors include the Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Hoefer Prize, the Peter David Faith Endowed Memorial Award, the Rappaport Prize, the European American Musical Alliance Prize, and the Jim Highsmith Orchestral Composition Prize.

Jeffrey is also an organist, conductor, and vocalist. He recently made his Walt Disney Concert Hall debut in the world premiere performance of David Lang’s sleeper’s prayer. He has also sung professionally with the San Francisco Symphony Chorus and Schola Cantorum San Francisco, and most recently with The Benedict 16, Tonality, Golden Bridge, Choir of St. James, and LASchola.

Johannes Brahms, arr. Conrad Susa: Vier ernste Gesänge (Four Serious Songs), Op. 121 (1896, arr. 1993)

-Content warning: severe or terminal illness and death-

Johannes Brahms composed his *Four Serious Songs* in part as an exercise to help him confront the reality of his impending death. Medical records from May of 1896 note the onset of symptoms related to cancer of the liver. Around this time, he presumably began to confront his fate and embrace his mortality in the

best and only way he knew how to do it: through music. Mercifully, he was able to attend the premiere performance of this work for bass soloist and piano on November 9, 1896, in Vienna, though he was jaundiced, underweight, and fatigued. He died at the age of 63 just months later, on April 3, 1897.

In short, it was his last work, and it represents not only his documentation of his own death experience but also his final words to us on fundamental truths about life.

These songs set biblical texts: the first two movements from The Book of Ecclesiastes, the third from the now apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach), and the fourth and final song from St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. Overall, the cycle musically paints a clear progression of reactions and emotional states on the part of its speaker, from fear and confusion in the first song to bewilderment and anger in the second and third songs to acceptance and joy in the third and fourth songs. The work captures what it must feel like to learn about one's death, to be deeply afraid of the unknown, to be angry at the injustice of losing one's life, but then to embrace death as a welcome friend who relieves pain and anguish.

The American composer **Conrad Susa** (1935-2013) was a devotee of Johannes Brahms. During his tenure as a Professor at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, he taught several popular seminars on Brahms's music to his always-eager students. However, these particular songs struck Susa in a deeply poignant and personal manner. In 1991, Susa approached Dr. Stan Hill, then conductor of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, with a proposal for arranging Brahms's final composition for men's chorus and orchestrating the lush piano part for winds, horns, and strings. Stan Hill agreed, and the new arrangement of the work was eventually recorded on an album by the chorus, with Susa conducting. In the published edition of the piano vocal score in 1992, Susa wrote:

“What does a chorus do after they perform the *Alto Rhapsody*?

Answer: *Four Serious Songs*.”

This era in the history of not only SFGMC but queer choruses, in general, is distinguished by a sustained commitment to a wide variety of repertoire which regularly included Western classical music in addition to popular music selections. In some sense, music and the performance of established works from the Western art music canon was a shield for the men who sang in that chorus and the gay community in San Francisco during political unrest and upheaval. Most

significantly, Susa was the first composer ever commissioned by a gay chorus, and he was boldly open from the start about his homosexuality. His long-established relationship with SFGMC began as soon as he moved to San Francisco in 1972, around the same time as the chorus's founding. He was involved from the start.

For Susa, writing this work was, in part, a response to the loss of his beloved partner, Nikos Kafkalis, who had died of AIDS just a few years before in 1988. Like so many gay men during that period, Susa had taken care of Nikos at his bedside through the course of his illness and death. He had, therefore, witnessed some similar progression toward death as it unfolded for the person he loved most. Therefore, as he had done with so many other composers many times, Susa turned to his friend Johannes Brahms for solace, clarity, and strength.

The resulting expansion of *Vier Ernste Gesänge* is not just an arrangement of Brahms' existing work. It is a dilation or magnification of Brahms' experience presented in stereo surround sound, thus allowing us to hear it with new ears and real immediacy.

What do a chorus and orchestra do to a set of heart-wrenching songs?

Answer: amplify them.

We Queerfolk do indeed have quite a lot to teach the rest of the world. Many people are afraid of things that have already happened to us. In the case of gay men, they already knew what it was like to lose everyone beloved to them in rapid-fire swaths to an unexplained disease with no cure and no answers. While the world crucified them for their so-called "lifestyles," they buried more and more friends and lovers every day. There was no time to grieve before the next news befell them.

When doors closed in our faces, we Queerfolk opened windows, and we continuously gave everything we had to make the world a better place, using the wisdom gleaned from our collective lives.

If Brahms's experience of his own transition accurately depicts a single death, the understanding of our historical experience during the AIDS crisis is far too vast to measure. Fortunately, as with Brahms and Susa, Susa and Kafkalis, and ECMC and QUO, even this seemingly insurmountable devastation is exceeded only by our love for one another.

— Vince Peterson

-End content warning-

**Piotr Ilych Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6 in B minor,
Op. 74, “Pathétique” (1893)**

The composer

Rarely has an artist’s personal life been as intricately linked with their creative work as Tchaikovsky’s was. To enlighten the context of his Sixth Symphony, also known as Pathétique (passionate, by the way, not pathetic), it is worthwhile to begin with the composer’s story.

Although Tchaikovsky was no child prodigy, watching his mother and governess play piano and sing kindled an early obsession with music. The Tchaikovsky family was very affectionate, and young Pyotr was the most sensitive of the bunch; the governess called him un enfant de verre: a glass boy. When he enrolled in a school at age 9, he was bullied mercilessly and looked to music to find solace. He wrote at the time, “I never leave the piano, which makes me feel happy when I feel sad.”

Growing concerned with his soft affect and his propensity toward music (an unheard of career at the time in Russia), Pyotr’s parents sent him to boarding school at the Imperial School of Jurisprudence in St. Petersburg. Pyotr missed his mother terribly, and when he was 14 and she was 41, she died of cholera. This crushing blow would resonate for the rest of Pyotr’s life in his melancholic nature, which often found poignant expression in his music.

Pyotr’s were not the only parents who sent their son to the School of Jurisprudence with hopes that the education would “straighten” them out. The school was known to have many homosexual students and even had a lewd school song composed by the students that glorified gay sex. It was here that he shared the first and deepest love of his life with Sergey Kireyev. At the time, Pyotr wrote a song called *My Genius, My Angel, My Friend*, dedicated to “.....”—13 dots, one for each letter of his love’s name.

After graduating at age 19, Tchaikovsky spent a few years following in his father’s footsteps as a civil servant while avidly pursuing amorous adventures, at least until concerns over a homosexual scandal impeded him. He was one of the first students to enroll at The St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1862, where he studied Western European composition while pursuing a passion for Russian and Ukrainian folk music on his own time. His music laces together the two traditions in a way that was criticized by the left for adopting Western forms instead of

Russian ones and by the academic right for nationalistic pandering. Nevertheless, his unique voice would eventually make him Russia's first fully professional composer.

Though homosexuality in Russia was not repressed to the degree of Victorian England, social convention forced Tchaikovsky to keep even his most ardent affairs discreet, and he felt pressure from his family to marry. He waged a decades-long internal battle over his homosexuality, first feeling a sense of moral indifference, then believing that he should abandon his desires and marry. In 1877, at virtually the same time as he confessed his love for one of his students, he started receiving love letters from Antonia Milyukova (later Tchaikovskaya). The two married the same year, but spent only a month together before Tchaikovsky left her. "There is nothing more fruitless than not wanting to be that which I am by nature," Tchaikovsky wrote in 1878. After this point, he felt guilt over his treatment of his wife (who never accepted a divorce), but no tumult over his homosexuality.

In the late 1880's, Tchaikovsky's nephew, Vladimir "Bob" Davydov, became increasingly important in his life. Davydov, like his uncles Pyotr and Modest before him, had his gay awakening at the School of Jurisprudence. The details of his relationship with Pyotr are not well known, but they spent much time together, and their letters demonstrate a deep mutual affection. Tchaikovsky dedicated his Sixth Symphony to Davydov, but unlike his early song, this dedication was public.

The symphony

Emerging from a primordial hum, the first movement unfolds with a dramatic exchange between impetuous, overpowering music and a distinctly sensual theme, as though the purest, most passionate love meets imposing threats. The second movement is a gracious waltz, but instead of the traditional three beat meter, this movement is in five beats, a novelty in music at the time. Here, Tchaikovsky fuses his unparalleled talent for writing waltzes (e.g. The Nutcracker and Swan Lake) with his love for Russian folk music, in which meters of five are more common.

The third movement is a robust march with relentless momentum, but the musical material barely develops. Even at the exhilarating conclusion—the symphony's false finale—there's a sense that the march didn't defeat the menace of the first

movement, which comes back in full force in the work's actual finale. Profound despair and rending sweetness vie for prominence, drawing a long arc with the symphony's opening. The composer's emotional genius was never sharper.

Whereas Tchaikovsky dodged fate in his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, the Sixth meets it head-on. As he completed the symphony, Tchaikovsky wrote to Davydov, "I absolutely consider it to be the best, and in particular, the most sincere of all my creations. I love it as I have never loved any of my other musical offspring." In its sincerity, perhaps we hear a glass boy's innocence shattered by the loss of his mother, a queer man's determination to love in the face of adversity, or a composer's quest for authentic expression amid criticism. Any deeper meaning that Tchaikovsky imbued in the music remains an enigma, but the life-and-death struggle of the symphony are uniquely compelling.

Tchaikovsky did not have much time to celebrate after he conducted the premiere of the Sixth Symphony. He was hard at work on plans for a new opera, making progress on his Third Piano Concerto, and looking forward to an ambitious tour. However, the *Pathétique* would be his final completed work: nine days after the premiere, at a great crescendo of his creative powers, Tchaikovsky was dead. The official recorded cause of death was cholera that the composer contracted by drinking unboiled water at a restaurant during a serious outbreak in St. Petersburg. He was 53 years old.

David's further musings on the context of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*

- Content warning: suicide -

Most writing about the story surrounding Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony departs fully from citable facts without acknowledging its escape. For my part, I'd like to make it clear I am now hanging up my program annotator hat in order to address theories of Tchaikovsky's death that do not pass scholarly muster for inclusion in a program note.

Many musicologists have written that Tchaikovsky's death was not a tragic accident. Some point out that the cholera epidemic in St. Petersburg at the time was well-known, and that drinking unboiled water would have exceeded the territory of carelessness, instead demonstrating a clear and deliberate act of suicide. No reputable scholarly evidence has been uncovered to support this theory.

Other scholars have gone much further. They leveraged what is no more than second-hand hearsay to spin a tale wherein the composer's homosexuality (and particularly his affection for his nephew), is supposed to have become known to his former classmates at the Imperial School of Jurisprudence. It is alleged that these classmates formed a court of honor and summoned the composer to a hearing, and that after Tchaikovsky this meeting, he went home and took arsenic, preferring death to the public humiliation of an official censure from the school. There is, in fact, no trace of evidence that this event took place, and yet this elaborate story is one of the most widely accepted theories on the cause of the composer's death.

Another theory that deserves even less ink alleges that Tsar Alexander III himself ordered the composer to kill himself after he allegedly heard tell of Tchaikovsky's affairs. The paper trail? You guessed it: none.

One convenient commonality of the suicide theories is the claim that Tchaikovsky's brother Modest (who was also gay) did Piotr a final favor for his reputation by inventing the accidental cholera story as a coverup for the composer's supposed suicide, destroying the correspondence relevant to what theorists believe to be the actual cause of death.

Rumors of suicide began to spread days after the composer's death, at which point commenters began calling the *Pathétique* a symphonic suicide note. The spurious moniker has adhered itself ominously to the work since its second performance three weeks after Tchaikovsky's death. To this day, some assert the symphony's devastating finale conveys a will to die. For my part, I hear a protest against death: a will to live. Many performers, reifying the suicide theories, allow the very end of the symphony (following a low brass chorale) to fade away, I dare say, pathetically. They take a tempo much slower than the *Andante giusto* indicated by the composer and ignore the sharp accents that Tchaikovsky repeats relentlessly, instead painting a picture of the symphony's protagonist giving up on life. The basses in the final bars do resemble a heartbeat slowing to a stop, but to my ear, this is only after a valiant fight for life.

To say the quiet part out loud rather bluntly, the suicide theories imply that Tchaikovsky killed himself because he was gay. They play into the insidious narrative that queerness can only be a source of shame. When scholars make these claims as if they were fact, they further entrench the shame narrative and

take a swing at what they deem to be an otherwise laudable artist's fatal flaw: his queerness.

As we take in this symphony tonight, let's ground our listening in facts before anything else. First, queerness is a source of love, joy, beauty, pride, and so much more positivity in the world. Second, Tchaikovsky died before his time, and at present, we lack the facts to explain it. Third, Tchaikovsky put all of himself into his music, especially his queerness; if you love his music, you love his queerness.

At his first rehearsal with QUO, Empire City Men's Chorus Artistic Director Vince Peterson said, "Queer people have so much to teach the world, and we're only just getting started." As one of only a handful of queer orchestras in the country, it's our job to set the record gay. The Sixth Symphony is not a suicide note; it's a love letter to life.

— David Bloom

- End content warning -



We were together. I forget the rest. is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



We were together. I forget the rest. is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

Texts and translations

Jeffrey Parola: *Break Forth, Dream*

I. *Earth!*

Earth! Though you look so
 impassive, ample and spheric there--
 —I now suspect that is not all,
I now suspect there is something terrible in
 you, ready to break forth,
For an athlete loves me, and I him—But
 toward him there is something fierce
 and terrible in me,
I dare not tell it in words—not even in these
 songs.

II. *I dreamed*

I dreamed in a dream of a city where all the men were like brothers,
O I saw them tenderly love each other—I often saw them, in numbers,
 walking hand in hand;
I dreamed that was the city of robust friends—Nothing was greater there
 than manly love—it led the rest,
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city, and in all their
 looks and words.

— Walt Whitman

Johannes Brahms, arr. Conrad Susa: *Vier ernste Gesänge* (Four Serious Songs)

I. *Denn es gehet dem Menschen*

Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"

So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?

— Ecclesiastes 3:19–22, New International Version

II. *Ich wandte mich und sahe*

Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter.

And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive.

But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.

— Ecclesiastes 4:1–3, New International Version

III. *O Tod, wie bitter bist du*

O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions, unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things: yea, unto him that is yet able to receive meat! O death, how bitter art thou!

O death, acceptable is thy sentence unto the needy, and to him whose strength faileth, that is now in the last age, and is vexed with all things, and to him that despaireth, and hath lost patience! O death, how acceptable is thy sentence!

— Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 41:1–2, King James Version (Apochrypha)

IV. *Wenn ich mit Menschen und mit Engelszungen redete*

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

— 1st Corinthians 13:1–3, 12–13, New International Version



**As always, a huge THANK YOU from our
Chosen Family to you and yours.**

About Our Home: Church of the Holy Apostles

QUO has made its home at the Church of the Holy Apostles since 2010, but Holy Apostles has been welcoming LGBT groups and parishioners since the beginning of the gay rights movement in New York. “I know of few New York City LGBTQ organizations which did not have a home at some point in their history at the Church of the Holy Apostles,” says Father Rand Frew, 12th Rector of Holy Apostles.

When QUO violinist Joey Plaster discovered that the Gay Activists Alliance had its headquarters at Holy Apostles in the early seventies, we reached out to Fr. Frew for more information. He shared, “The annual Pride March was announced in the bulletin and verbally, and people were encouraged to take part for the expansion of human rights. The Chelsea Gay Association met at Holy Apostles. The late Vito Russo’s documentary, groundbreaking film *The Celluloid Closet* was first previewed and shown at Holy Apostles with commentary by Mr. Russo.

QUO: The Queer Urban Orchestra would like to thank the following donors for their continued support. Any donation to QUO is tax deductible as we are a 501(c)(3) certified organization. With your generous support we are able to keep music on our stands and instruments in our hands.

Amethyst (5000+)

Artist-Warrior Charitable Fund
Howard Gilman Foundation

New York City Department of
Cultural Affairs
New York State Council on the Arts
August & Orin Op't Hof

Sapphire (1000 - 4999)

Alphabet, Inc.
Bjorn Berkhout & Todd Nickow
Sander & Norma K Buchman Fund
Julia Cohen & Randi Solomon

Etsy.com
Alan Hyde & Mark Romatz
Anne Levy Charitable Trust
Joshua Li
Scott Oaks & James Adler

Emerald (750 - 999)

Ryan Gochee

Leonard Gottlieb

Topaz (500 - 749)

Ayco Charitable Foundation
Microsoft
Nicanor Salas
Charlie Scatamacchia

Ben Solis
Dane Stalcup
Jonathan Stark
Phong Ta & Joe Passon

Amber (250 - 499)

Alex Arellano & Emile Chung
Elliott Case
Mary Dresden
Peter Fifield
Trevor Hardwick &
Stephen Flaherty
Alex Humesky & Dustin Zuelke
Michele Kaufman & Jo Ellen Fusco
Dakota Keyser
Hilton Marcus
Navin Manglani

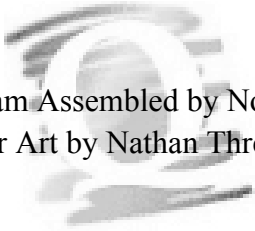
Keith Martinez
Andrew Op't Hof &
Alan Schoenfeld
Steven Petrucelli
Ann & Mike Pitts
Adam Richardson
Nicholas Saunders
SiriusXM
Christopher Spiegelman
Larry Stalcup
Shang Wei Young
Penglong Zhu

Ruby (50 - 249)

Stephen Aber
Adler Oaks Music
Library
amazon.com
Joanne Barres
Andrew Berman
Eric & Reyna
Berman
Mikhail Barton
Roland Bellerud
Diana Bordelon
Tanya Bruce
Jessica Budd
Leila Carboneli
Deborah Cardona
Julia Case
Jared Chamoff
Bo Chao
Liann Cline
Gustavo Correa
Philip Covitz
Cre8ive NYC
Charles Dinarello
Peter Eliopoulos
Pamela Fifield
Norbert Gasser

Matthew Hadley
Julie Hodorowski
Julia Hosch
Ann Hurley
Gerard Jacobs
Marisa James
Bradley Knapp
Karina Knapp
John Kriskiewicz
Adam Lambert
Charles Lee
Laura Lines
David Lohman &
Bowen Zhang
Marc Lubin
Da Luo
James McLaughlin
Kevin Mathieu
Michelle Mathios
Richard Milburn
William Milne
Ana Montenegro
Michael Munley
Darryl Nau
Fran Novak
Kate Penrose
Hannah Perryman

Eric Peterson
Todd Porter
Dilles Pilevsky
Nicole Pilevsky
Leonel Ponce
William Powell
Michael Rosen
Martin Sayer
Elizabeth
Schoellkopf
Ben Seaman
Brian Shannon
Christian Smythe
Indraneel Sur
Brittany Taylor
Alex Tereshonkova
Tisbest Philanthropy
Christine Varajao
Michael Viljoen
Erikka Vinci
Kyle Walker
Daniel Williams
Michael Williamson
Carleen Wood
Debbie Yacos
Kevin Yan



Concert Program Assembled by Nolan N Dresden
Cover Art by Nathan Threlkeld

Upcoming Events

Giving Everything- 30th Anniversary Concert

Friday, May 31st at 8pm & Sunday, June 2nd at 5pm

Adler Hall, New York Society for Ethical Culture

Empire City Men's Chorus with QUO: The Queer Urban Orchestra

QUO's Pride Gala: Doubtless Magick

Saturday, June 15th at 8pm

Church of the Holy Apostles

Including works by **Saint-Saëns**, selections from *My Neighbor Totoro*, and a world premier by QUO's Associate Conductor **Derek Weagle**.

We're thrilled to share a sneak peak of our 2024/2025 season!

The season will kick off with a celebration of QUO's 15th anniversary, featuring QUO's Concertmaster **Phong Ta** alongside music by **Schubert**, **Ravel**, and QUO's own **Noah Green**.

In March 2025, we will launch the first-ever **QUOfest**, headlined by a concert celebrating 10 years of marriage equality in the US, including a return to the podium by former Artistic Director **Nolan N Dresden**, and music by **Yaz Lancaster** and **Gershwin**. The festival also includes a chamber concert, a family program, and a sound healing event.

The season will feature QUO's signature blend of orchestral favorites from **Prokofiev** to **Mahler**, diamonds in the rough from **Omar Thomas** to **Cécile Chaminade**, and a major world premiere by **Rajna Swaminathan**.

Our 2024/2025 season will also feature performances at new, exciting, and larger venues and a dazzling roster of guest artists. Stay tuned for the full announcement!

From our Friends

Soundcake: Aural Confections

Wednesday, June 12th at 7:30pm

Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts

Featuring RuPaul Drag Race icons **Monét X Change & Sapphira Cristál**, conducted by QUO's own **David Bloom**.

Finally, be sure to book your tickets now for our end of year
PRIDE GALA including silent auction and more.

 **QUEER URBAN ORCHESTRA**
presents

PRIDE GALA DOUBTLESS MAGICK

feat. Jordan Rutter-Covatto, counter-tenor
World premier of Derek Weagle's Doubtless Magick

Saturday, June 15, 2024 • 8:00 p.m.
Church of the Holy Apostles • 296 9th Ave.
David Bloom, Artistic Director
QueerUrbanOrchestra.org

*ANY AND ALL INFORMATION PROVIDED REGARDING THE REMAINDER OF THE
2023-2024 SEASON AND THE 2024/2025 SEASON IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE
WITHOUT PRIOR NOTIFICATION.*

COMPASS



Leonard Gottlieb

Licensed Associate Real Estate Broker

646.408.4008

leonard.gottlieb@compass.com



Compass is a licensed real estate broker and abides by Equal Housing Opportunity laws. All material presented herein is intended for informational purposes only. Information is compiled from sources deemed reliable but is subject to errors, omissions, changes in price, condition, sale, or withdrawal without notice. No statement is made as to the accuracy of any description. All measurements and square footages are approximate. This is not intended to solicit property already listed. Nothing herein shall be construed as legal, accounting or other professional advice outside the realm of real estate brokerage.