

THE CROSSING @ CHRISTMAS

CAROLS AFTER A PLAGUE

WORLD PREMIERES

CONDUCTOR Donald Nally

THE CROSSING

Katy Avery, Nathaniel Barnett, Kelly Ann Bixby, Karen Blanchard, Steven Bradshaw, Micah Dinger, Ryan Fleming, Joanna Gates, Dimitri German, Steven Hyder, Michael Jones, Lauren Kelly, Anika Kildegaard, Heidi Kurtz, Maren Montalbano, Rebecca Myers, Kyle Sackett, Daniel Schwartz, Rebecca Siler, Tiana Sorenson, Daniel Spratlan, Elisa Sutherland, Daniel Taylor, Jackson Williams

ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR Kevin Vondrak

KEYBOARDS John Grecia

SOUND DESIGN Paul Vazquez

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Jonathan Bradley

OPERATIONS MANAGER Shannon McMahon

GRANTS MANAGER Katie Feeney

FRIDAY, **DECEMBER 17** @ 7 PM

Zellerbach Theatre

There will be no intermission.

PROGRAM

Carols after a Plague: I. Urgency

Shara Nova

(Shara Nova's) *Carols after a Plague* was commissioned for The Crossing by Steven Hyder and Donald Nally.

Requiem for a Plague

Tyshawn Sorey

Requiem for a Plague was commissioned for The Crossing and Donald Nally by members of The Board of Directors of The Crossing: Tim Blair, Phil Cooke, Micah Dinger, Shawn Felton, Tuomi Forrest, Mary Hangle, Lisa Husseini, Cindy Jarvis, Mary Loiselle, Pam Prior, Andrew Quint, James Reese, Carol Shloss, John Slattery and Beth Van de Water.

Rising Stars

Edith Canat de Chizy

Rising Stars was commissioned for The Crossing and Donald Nally by The Bixby Family and Chris Weidner.

The Undisappeared

Joseph C. Phillips, Jr.

The Undisappeared was commissioned for The Crossing by Mark & Rebecca Bernstein, Laura Ward & David Newmann, Laura Madeleine, William Toffey & Kathryn Krantz, Cindy Jarvis and Andrew Quint.

a carol called love

LJ White

a carol called love was commissioned by The Crossing and Donald Nally.

Everything Passes, Everything is Connected

Samantha Fernando

Everything Passes, Everything is Connected was commissioned for The Crossing by Kim and Ed Shiley.

Colouring-In Book

Leila Adu

Colouring-In Book was commissioned for The Crossing and Donald Nally by an anonymous donor in memory of Marion Yin Ping Wong.

y-mas

Nina Shekhar

y-mas was commissioned by The Crossing and Donald Nally.

Carols after a Plague: II. Tone-policing

Shara Nova

Shining Still

Vanessa Lann

Commissioned by The Crossing.

Alone Together

Mary Jane Leach

Alone Together was commissioned by The Crossing and Donald Nally.

Exodus

Alex Berko

Exodus was commissioned by The Crossing and Donald Nally.

Still So Much to Say

Viet Cuong

Still So Much to Say was commissioned for The Crossing by Michael and Lise Meloy in honor of Meghan, Grace and Abigail.

Carols after a Plague: III. Resolve

Shara Nova

A NOTE FROM DONALD NALLY

We call our 2021 project "Carols after a Plague" because of the ambiguity of those words.

After? (we had hoped)

A? (just one?)

Plague. Which plague? Our pandemic?

Or the ongoing plagues we endure: racism, poverty, displacement, environmental deterioration, gun violence, homelessness...

Carol. How?

To many, a familiar song, communal, outside, seasonal.

To others, strange words celebrating what appear to be unlikely persons and events.

Season, song, company. Carol.

We asked twelve composers – twelve, the divisions of the hour, of the year, of the days of Christmas – to respond to our project title, leaving it to them to address what “Carols after a Plague” meant to them: an exercise in perspective, in experience, in histories that are widely and at times wildly different.

We received gifts – more than we had hoped. Twelve brief, deeply personal, musical ruminations on our battered, resilient world. What emerged is this collection and a strange logic of relations: the connection of one text to the next, the shared concerns, the empathy of isolation, the opportunity to sing the words of another and perhaps, in doing so, better understand their experience. The invitation to live within the walls of Tyshawn Sorey’s haunting sound world, summarizing the isolation and discontent of our time. The invitation to sing as Nina Shekhar for a few moments, placing familiar Christmas songs in a different context, where they are not a part of one’s story, where they stand as a barrier to a child’s great desire to assimilate. The invitation to join Shara Nova’s exploration of her whiteness, her attempt to untangle it: to embrace what it means, and to celebrate (in fact, welcome) the discomfort of asking difficult questions. The invitation to join Joe Phillips on his stoop in Brooklyn and find, from the aloneness, a neighborhood. The gift list goes on, far more imaginative than the wish list, but that’s the beauty and the honor of living in a world of new music.

Not one of these carols is a carol in the traditional sense. They are, instead, our carols: of our time, dressing and addressing wounds, looking forward, bringing us together, reminding us of our own humanity – a goal that lies at the heart of this annual gathering, *The Crossing @ Christmas*. Not a Christmas-specific event at all, but rather, one of unanswered questions delivered through the filter of composers’ thoughts over a foundation of truth and grace, goodwill, perhaps even “god with us.”

Our plagues are many, and we learn to live with them. Maybe, someday, these carols will, like their more conventional predecessors, hold similar purpose in the lives of future generations: songs they will come together and sing to remind them of times past, stories in which their ancestors overcame challenges while they celebrated life and wondered at the mystery of its endings. Songs about community, about enlightenment, and about salvation reached, not from a benevolent deity, but from ourselves.

PROGRAM TEXTS

Carols after a Plague: I. Urgency

Words and music by Shara Nova

A note from the composer:

These songs are not about changing someone’s mind or proving anything to anyone. They are, I hope, a small contribution to a culture of healing. Of slowing down. Of normalizing conversations about racism. Of learning to notice the cultural habit of tone policing Black women, and as a white person, inhibiting those reactions and learning to sit with the complexity of feelings that arise in stillness. And a call to come back to the commitment that we may have made to join the Black Lives Matter movement when George Floyd was murdered, but then things with other white people got hard and we may have withdrawn to solitude or status quo.

I want to acknowledge the work of Resmaa Menakem and his book, *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, and the impact his teaching has had on this music. I also want to give thanks to my mentor Kelly Germaine for her guidance, and my white musicians caucus with whom I am practicing in community, the work of somatic abolitionism. I am continuing to study, and learn to identify the ways in which white body supremacy presents in my own body and mind, and then continuing to do the slow work of training new somatic responses.

Take care of yourselves and each other as you sing, as you listen to each other.

In the beginning
there was the sound of cymbals crashing
And in the end all things will drift away
just as a noise disappears into silence.
While here in the between time you are in a rush.
How is it that it came to be?
How is it that you are able to imagine
before and after time?
How is it to slow down time
and wander and wonder out under the sky.

Requiem for a Plague

Music by Tyshawn Sorey
Wordless

A note from the composer:

This composition is by no means a joyful “carol,” in the traditional sense. Rather, it is a contemplative work that I feel deals with the question of what exactly are we referring to when we speak of “the plague” in the context of this very critical time (the years 2020 and 2021 and the COVID-19 pandemic in particular). Is this “plague” limited to the COVID-19 pandemic? Are we making work about this pandemic only? Perhaps we shall thusly refer to the continued feeling of being confined in isolation, the despair and frustration that we experience as a result of social distancing, and the everyday precarity with regard to the quality of – and certainly of living – life as an artist. Furthermore, we shall examine the uptick in gun violence as it concerns racism, sexism, and homophobia, among many other civil strifes. Not to mention the threat of eviction, the separation of immigrant families through deportation and other means, homelessness, climate change, and so on...

This composition is a direct response to all of the above.

Rising Stars

Music by Edith Canat de Chizy
Words by Walt Whitman

A note from the composer:

“Shake out carols!”

This poem by Walt Whitman seemed to me to correspond perfectly to the renewal expected after this terrible pandemic.

“Shake out carols!”

To celebrate a new era that is at first announced stealthily: “I must be still, be still to listen...”

But soon life asserts itself, “O happy life,” triumphing over the darkness of the past...

O rising stars !
Perhaps the one I want so much will rise [with some of you].

Shake out carols !
Solitary here, the night’s carols !
Carols of lonesome love! death’s carols !
Carols under that lagging, yellow, waning moon !
O under that moon where she droops almost down into the sea !
O reckless despairing carols.

[For] somewhere I believe I heard my mate responding to me.
[So faint,] I must be still, be still to listen.

That is the whistle of the wind, not my voice.
That is the fluttering, the fluttering of the spray,
Those are the shadows of leaves.

O darkness! o in vain!
O I am very sick and sorrowful.
O brown halo in the sky near the moon, drooping upon the sea !

O past ! O happy life ! O songs of joy !

Loved ! Loved ! Loved ! O past!

– excerpted from “Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,” from *Sea Drift*, in from *Leaves of Grass* (1891-1892). Lines and words omitted by the composer are indicated by dashes and brackets.

The Undisappeared

Words and music by Joseph C. Phillips, Jr.

A note from the composer:

I don't know exactly when in those scary, uncertain early days of the pandemic, in March 2020 at 7 pm each evening, the people of New York City started to lean out windows, fill backyards & rooftops, and gather on stoops and streets to cheer essential workers—those that could not stay home because they treated the sick and dying, stocked the grocery store shelves, or still drove the buses and subway trains so that the city (and the lives of others) could continue, even if only partially.

Most evenings our family would come outside on our stoop and we clapped, cheered, and gave thanks along with everyone else. After the cheering faded everyone would disappear back inside. As the weeks went on however, after the 7 pm cheering, we would stay outside with our neighbors on the stoop rather than return inside. Spread out among two adjoining stoops, we talked, laughed, and shared stories and wine. And evening by evening, the news of growing social justice protests against systemic injustice mingled with our own more mundane individual realities; and story by story, our worries and fears during the pandemic began to lessen as we found true connections with friends. And in doing so, together, we all undisappeared.

We come out at the anointed time.
Emerging from our everyday sameness
to raise voices in gratitude for those who continue,
what was not seen, in the before.

The street celebratories cool back into
the wounded city's nights of new silences,
except for the laughter of friends
radiating from our stoop.

We stay gathered, sharing selves
bedimmed by the getting-through;
finding what was not seen, in the before:
together, we undisappear.

Tomorrow those evening tendrils pass off,
as the sameness every day dawns;
but, at the anointed time, we return to the salutations, and the afters
–and begin to feel them once again.

a carol called love

Music by LJ White

Words by Alex Dimitrov

a note from the composer:

a carol called love is a setting of portions of a poem called *love*, an ongoing text currently hosted on Twitter, to which poet Alex Dimitrov has been adding a new line starting with "I love" every day for several years. The poem's life span includes mid-March 2020 through a year later, and I found Dimitrov's words to be an apt chronicle of how I experienced the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic. The text barely, if ever, alludes to the concrete events of the time. However, its focus on the constancy of nature, mundane observations and pleasures, endurance through depression, the large-scale passage of time, love for friends, and love for New York, Dimitrov's home city, all rang true for me. Like so many others I know, I spent that time period coping with sadness, loneliness, anger, reduced employment, and existential fear, leaning on the solace of being outdoors, finding innovative ways to hold my friends close, relating to my home city of Chicago with a new mixture of grief, love, unfamiliarity, and solidarity, and thinking often of New York, the city that has always felt like my own home away from home.

In creating this piece, I chose some of my favorite "I love" tweets from mid-March 2020 to mid-March 2021 to use as foregrounded text, intended to be heard through the ensemble texture. I also created a background texture mostly using text sung with free rhythm, which comes across as a sort of communal murmuring effect. The text for these parts is chosen individually by singers from a large repository of the poem from that one-year period. Through the singers' agency over the words in the performance, the piece becomes about them and their own experiences, as well as mine and Dimitrov's. It becomes an act of collective processing of a still-inscrutable time.

I love that most of it escapes description
I love that loneliness loses its shape when we sleep
I love that water covers mostly everything
I love how time explains nothing
I love when people don't lie when you ask how they are
I love that New York continues to be New York
I love when the sky is black and clear
I love the sea (what is the sea)
I love that every summer is personal
I love being in a car with the windows down
I love crying. It's exercise.
I love that there's always someone moving to New York
I love a hard rain
I love even the past but it's another country
I love what fog does to bridges
I love just finding that spot in a bar to think from
I love the internet but I might drop my phone in a river
I love the waves and their endless repetition
I love a weekend in bed
I love everyone thinking of giving up being an artist right now for something more practical. Don't do it.
I love the lights from a plane coming into the city
I love how you used to meet someone at a record store
I love rivers
I love this photo from a time in my life when I was very unhappy & the thing that kept me going was New York
I love how somehow it's all been more and less than I imagined
I love December but who would miss the year at this hour
I love the beach on a cold night
I love the way we rarely take photos when actually happy. We forget. It's almost like we aren't there.
I love the sky because it's always open
I love how some nights it feels like you can never die
I love to be reminded that none of this has to be the way that it is
I love how everything can happen

& nothing can change
& nothing can happen
& everything can change
& everything can happen

– Drawn from a series of Alex Dimitrov's daily tweets beginning "I love...," first appearing March 11, 2020 and ongoing. Additional texts from the same series are chanted in the sustained chords of the work.

Everything Passes, Everything is Connected

Words and music by Samantha Fernando

A note from the composer:

Both the text and its musical response have a stillness at their core. The words speak to the isolation of lockdown but also the comfort that can be found in a mindful approach to these challenges.

Everything passes
Everything is connected
And
Walk
Space
Slow
Pause
Wait
Breathe

Daily
 Together
Weekly
 Together
Inside
Apart

Everything passes
Everything is connected
And
Touch
Breath
Contour
Within

Rooted
Weathered
Untethered
Me
And
You
And
Us

Everything passes
Everything is connected

Colouring-In Book

Words and music by Leila Adu-Gilmore

A note from the composer:

Colouring-In Book is the story of waking up every day believing that the world will be different and finding that we may, instead, face the same problems. The repeating black and white pages of the poem are about trauma, and post-traumatic stress, whether collective or personal. The song's dedication is "to every child, teenager & adult who needs to know that they are not alone." The beginning of the song repeats "there, there" as in to a child, adding the first letters of the alphabet and the types of words that children use to learn it. Moving through different life stages, the tension of trying hard at life increases while the same outcomes repeat (at one time the singers getting stuck like a broken record). Rather than fruitlessly saying "man up," "cheer up," or "it'll all be okay," the piece openly acknowledges the pain of bad experiences. It is not a hero myth of winning and achieving but a recognition of the struggle of everyday people. By accepting our vulnerability and encouraging compassion for ourselves and others, we are able to make it through the hardest of times.

There is a paint-by-numbers book.

The first page, a photo.

A toddler and a bad scene.

I turn the page and it's
black and white.

As a child

I colour in, haphazardly
but intently.

As a teenager, I try again,
for fun.

I meet all the edges
with perfection.

But the colours are all wrong.

As an adult, I try, yet again.

I meet all the edges.

The colours are the right colours.
Exactly as they were.

But I turn the page and it's the same
black-and-white drawing again.

y-mas

Music by Nina Shekhar

Words excerpted and rewritten by the composer from popular Christmas songs

A note from the composer:

I'm dreaming of a White Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know

i want a hippopotamus for christmas
only a hippopotamus will do
no crocodiles, no rhinoceroses
i only like hippopotamuses
and hippopotamuses like me too

gone away is the bluebird
here to stay is a new bird
cuddly as a cactus, charming as an eel
i'm a bad banana with the greasy brown peel

they never let rudolph
join in any reindeer games

he sees you when you're sleeping
and he knows when you're awake
he knows if you've been bad or good
so be good for goodness sake

with candy canes and silver lanes aglow
(mary, did you know?)
been an awful good girl
(do you see what I see?)
god and sinners reconciled
(mary, did you know?)
joined the triumph of the skies
(do you hear what I hear?)

oh the weather outside is frightful
and your fire is so spiteful
but since i've no place to go
let it snow, let it snow, let it snow

i really can't stay (but baby, it's cold outside)
i've got to go away (but baby, it's cold outside)
i simply must go (but baby, it's cold outside)
the answer is no (but baby, it's cold outside)

with candy canes and silver lanes aglow
been an awful good girl
been an awful good girl

i want a hippopotamus for christmas
only a hippopotamus will do
i just want you for my own
more than you could ever know

Carols after a Plague: II. Tone-policing

Words and music by Shara Nova

Silence not Holy Black Madonna
Mother of All
Offer sacred praise to her
If not, thy tongue should silence give
Holy tone she is
Wholly listen in

Shining Still

Music by Vanessa Lann

Words by Vanessa Lann after Matthew Arnold

A note from the composer:

This piece was a response to the paradox in the title *Carols after a Plague* – the power of music, in its simplest sung form, to bring solace after (or maybe *during*) a global crisis. Of course, pandemics wreak death and destruction, but as Nietzsche famously said, “what doesn’t kill us, makes us stronger”. It’s in that spirit that I turned to the Victorian poet Matthew Arnold (1822-1888). A superstar writer of his time, he could convey perfectly deep personal loss in the middle of natural beauty in his long, narrative poems. In “Thyrsis” we hear the whispering voice of his deceased friend, imploring him to shun “fatigue and fear,” to gain strength from “the light we saw,” which is “shining still.” By setting and reinterpreting Arnold’s imaginary voices for the real and very beautiful ones of *The Crossing*, I wanted to instill hope in the wake of this calamity.

let in your voice,
a whisper,
to chase fatigue and fear.

I wandered till I died.

the light we sought
is shining still,
our tree yet crowns the hill.

Roam on!

the lost ones travel yet
the loved hillside,
the light you sought is shining still.

Shining still.

– Adapted from the last six lines of “Thyrsis” by Matthew Arnold, from *New Poems* (Macmillan, 1867).

Alone Together

Music by Mary Jane Leach

Wordless

A note from the composer:

Alone Together has no words. It didn’t start that way, as I found text I liked related to the fifteenth-century composer Obrecht, who died of the plague. However, when I started to insert the text, it felt wrong, as I felt the words got in the way of the emotion of this unsettling time. Instead, the music features ensemble sound (together) and isolated voices (alone), and ends tentatively, as we still don’t know how and/or when this all will end.

Exodus

Music by Alex Berko

Words adapted from Exodus 15:11 by the composer

A note from the composer:

Growing up Jewish, I did not feel a personal connection with the word “carol”. I did, however, have a connection with the word “plague”. The Old Testament is riddled with them, and I couldn’t help but draw a line between the plagues in the bible and the current plagues we face in our society. I found myself returning to the Mi Chamocho (Exodus 15:1-18): a prayer that was sung at the end of the Passover story directly after the Jews escaped Egypt. It is a love poem to God and it begins with a rhetorical

question: "Who is like you, O God..." To me, I did not see this as a rhetorical question but one of deep complication with my faith. This small phrase became the fertile ground for me to ask further questions. I wanted to take the grandiosity of that phrase and distill it into a child-like curiosity intertwined with uncertainty.

who is like you
will you protect me
should i thank you
will you stay silent

nevertheless, i pray

Still So Much to Say

Music by Viet Cuong

Words by David Ferry

A note from the composer:

This piece sets a fragment from the final stanza of "Resemblance" by David Ferry.

[Virgil said, when Eurydice died again,]
"There was still so much to say" that had not been said
[Even before her first death, from which he had vainly
Attempted, with his singing, to rescue her.]

– Excerpt of "Resemblance" from *Bewilderment: New Poems and Translations* (Phoenix Poets, 2012). Bracketed text omitted by the composer.

Carols after a Plague: III. Resolve

Words and music by Shara Nova

I wish you great joy in the perpetual discomfort,
in the shifting of the paradigm.
There will be no ease for a while.
What is your question?
Be not discouraged, do not fall into numbness.
Resolve to increase your discomfort,
and thus attain a calm body.
Be curious of one another.
Scribe the shared truths of history.
Reap the reward, truth.
Do not abandon high ideals.
Do not run to distraction.
Do not run from your discomfort.
Be curious.
Return to your commitments.
Increase your discomfort to find your joy,
and live humbly under the sun.

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

JAN 14	DAEDALUS QUARTET
JAN 20-22	LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO
JAN 28	CAMPBELL BROTHERS <i>John Coltrane's A Love Supreme</i>
JAN 30	CIRQUE MECHANICS <i>Birdhouse Factory</i>
FEB 4	THE JAZZ GALLERY ALL-STARS
FEB 4-5	TEATRO DELLE ALBE <i>fedeli d'Amore</i>
FEB 11	MACEO PARKER
FEB 18-19	TRINITY IRISH DANCE COMPANY
MAR 11-12	CIRCA: <i>Humans 2.0</i>
MAR 18-19	RENNIE HARRIS: <i>LIFTED</i>
MAR 26	RAVI COLTRANE
MAR 27	THE CROSSING <i>In a House Besieged</i>
APR 3	SFJAZZ COLLECTIVE
APR 7	ZAKIR HUSSAIN <i>Triveni</i>
APR 21	LILA DOWNS
APR 30-MAY 1	PHILADELPHIA CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL
MAY 1	KALABANTÉ <i>Afrique en Cirque</i>
MAY 5-7	MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP <i>Pepperland</i>
JUN 2-4	MOMIX <i>Alice</i>



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