LEGACIES

To whichever Gods are watching

Music by Christian Cruz
Text by Jorrell Watkins
Performed by Brylan Finley, Yan Cui, Isabel Fernandez, Rachel Fagerberg, Grace Jong, Chloe Owens, and The Living Earth Show

Horst Dannert Watches the Revolution, Televised

Music by Merle
Text by Darren Donate
Performed by Rachel Fagerberg and The Living Earth Show

street-slush

Music by Ella Kaale
Text by Lindsey Skillen
Performed by Yan Cui and The Living Earth Show

to kiss lipless

Music by Benjamin S. Beckman
Text by Michelle Orsi
Performed by Hannah Rice and The Living Earth Show

CA AB1780

Music by Andrew Norman
Text by the Legislature of the State of California

will you

Music and Text by Anuj Bhutani

Mother

1. Mother's Mouth

Music by Ted Hearne, Text by Chana Porter

2. Stones Don't Lie

Music and Text by Rohan Chander

Performed by Tanner Porter and The Living Earth Show

Texts and Program Notes

To whichever Gods are watching

Music by Christian Cruz
Text by Jorrell Watkins

How far do thoughts and prayers go?
Do they flare comets in outer space
Among the heavens, an echo—

School kids jumping from a window
Teacher peeling years off their face
How far do thoughts and prayers go?

Churches, Synagogues, Mosques, God show
sweet mercy in our graceless states.
Among the heavens, an echo

hertz over supermarket radio
perished and perishables, a wake of waste.
How far do thoughts and prayers go?

Dimmed theater, nightclub, casino
bright of another strobe marking what was safe.
Among the heavens, an echo

Council clutching gavel and ammo
add foxgloves to this bottomless vase.
How far do thoughts and prayers go?
Among the heavens, an echo.

Horst Dannert Watches the Revolution, Televised

Music by Merle
Text by Darren Donate

HORST DANNERT WATCHES THE REVOLUTION, TELEVISED
After Gil Scot-Heron

I recall what was once said about my early work,
how—*when used properly, can be a beautiful sight*—

like water curling over a land bridge
or a thin mist between islets,

but now the streets are knives, glinting against
a galvanized moon & the emergency lights wrap their colors

on each bruised knuckle. I sip slow from the tumbler, pause
for the blaze of clear spirit to wane from my throat,

& track the little figures on screen, the black vests and red caps
that unspool—five paces apart—at full-scale effort:

a collaboration, a coup. Broadcasted live,
the world is a rifle that I brace for

as the crowds surge together like a school of fish
toward the hunting grounds, opening their little mouths.
Swallow the tear gas, they chant. The feed freezes on a single frame—
bodies groping toward wire. I know they will not be contained.

Program Note

Razor wire, or barbed wire, comes in various types. One type is concertina or Dannert wire, which is formed in large coils that can be expanded like a concertina—invented during World War I by Horst Dannert.

Snippets of music from Gil Scott-Heron's *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised,* Kendrick Lamar's 2025 Super Bowl performance referencing Gil Scot-Heron, and Ted Hearne's *Beats* have been processed and transformed, forming musical objects which interact with the text and other musical objects or layers in this work.

street-slush

Music by Ella Kaale
Text by Lindsey Skillen

Excerpted from "When asked how much snow" by Lindsey Skillen:

When asked how much snow
You say
If I lay down in the street tonight
I'll be covered by morning

And that's where I keep you—
Where I want you—
All night

Under an enchantment
Laid out against salted concrete
Being buried alive
Flake-by-flake

You call me in the morning—
a man
Blood in your nose and cheekbones
You tremor with health—
alive

I watch snowflakes collect between your glasses and eyes
And still you push on
Piercing through
A frontiersman and his dog
Everything you see is yours, I'm afraid.

Program Note

I chose to set Lindsey's poem for the theme of "Legacies" because it evokes the long-lasting impacts of power-imbalanced relationships. The speaker vividly describes memories of a man as they pertain to snow, capturing the delicate nature of these wintery moments—the festivity and magic of snowfall, and the terror of being buried under it. My setting of Lindsey's poem seeks to explore the duality of memories from an unhealthy relationship—how we can resent these people who hurt us so much, but also reminisce on the good moments, and survive off those small dosages of joy until we heal fully.

to kiss lipless

Music by Benjamin S. Beckman
Text by Michelle Orsi

The text is below (excerpts from SLEEP WITH ME by Michelle Orsi):

What can I say without lips? My mouth holds too much. At least my fingers will speak for me. At least these keys can break a word open. I promise you these letters will lust with or without us.

What do I contain and what contains me? To contain might as well be to contaminate. Other words for contain: include; take in; embrace; consist of. Contaminate: pollute; defile; taint; infect; spoil. Earlier this evening, my father told me he has pink eye and that his eyes are nearly swollen shut. I half-believe I will acquire pink eye through the phone. Sound is a container, no? It can contaminate too.

I will be drinking coffee. I will wonder if my father is drinking, or sleeping. I will wonder if he has fed his dog yet. I will wonder how to break up with this man for the second time. Will: tend to; have a tendency to; are bound to; are going to; must. Break: smash; crack; split; fall to pieces; fall to bits.

Has the word “contain” started to annoy you yet? It’s annoying me. Such a clunky word. Maybe I’m just tired. Clunky: awkwardly solid. When you wake in the middle of the night does time still move forward? Does it stop? If a hibernating bear wakes, does it die?

Have I thought enough about tomorrow? Will I still be here? (I will be) Will he be? I lied about my lips, before. Remember? I do have lips, I just sometimes pretend that I don’t. Lip: edge, rim, brim, border. To kiss lipless is to surpass liminality. I would like to move without passing through.

Program Note

What makes good text-setting? When many composers write a piece of vocal music, they attempt to use the music to "satisfy" or "reflect" the text in "the best way possible" within their compositional language. Those terms are in quotes, though, because those meanings are essentially arbitrary – what makes a particular musical phrase or idea suitable for a textual one (or not)?

This piece attempts to explore that question. The text, selections of Michelle Orsi's poetry from her volume SLEEP WITH ME, defines (or redefines) certain words used within the poems themselves. In these moments, I tried to create a sequence of highly-structured musical gestures that capture, to the best of my ability, every subtle shade of meaning of each individual word (what is the difference between "rim" and "brim"? "tend to" and "have a tendency to"? "fall to pieces" and "fall to bits”—and how can these differences be captured musically?). This falls against a backdrop of deeply emotionally charged poetry about a character's relationship with her father, set to musical material that is intuitively composed—usually rhapsodic and free-flowing. I am wondering: how can concrete words create abstract ideas? How can concrete ideas be transmitted by words that are so abstract? What is musical meaning? What is meaning itself?

CA AB1780

Music by Andrew Norman
Text by the Legislature of the State of California

CA AB1780 is a bill passed by the California State Legislature in September 2024 that prohibits the practice of legacy and donor admissions preferences at private colleges and universities.

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will you

Music and Text by Anuj Bhutani

what will i leave behind
when i drift away with the tides of time
when i vanish from the shoreline?

will you watch the waves?
will you let me drown?

when my debris washes up
ashore for you to find
will you save what you can?
or will you let me disappear?

and if my bones start to bleach
lying out under the blazing sun
would you just let me turn into dust?
would you forget everything i've done?

and if the sand catches fire
burning everything along the shore
would you fix your gaze or look away?
would you go dancing in the flames?

and if i beg
will you watch me burn?
will you fan the flame?

Program Note

When my previous teacher Andrew Norman asked me in 2024 if I wanted to write a song for The Living Earth Show + Tanner Porter as part of the Legacies song cycle they were doing with the Sleeping Giant Collective, I was about to set a passage from Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (which I'd been obsessed with for years) for a different piece, since the book had finally entered the public domain. In that passage, there was one sentence that I realized wasn't going to make it in that piece, which contained the phrase "...where gold letters on marble

pages describe death in battle and how bones bleach and burn far away in Indian sands." The imagery of burning by the ocean stuck with me as I thought about both Woolf's and my own meditations on the uncertainty of time, impermanence, loss, and, of course, legacy, and the lyrics for this song are inspired by (and allude to) this phrase.

I was also excited to write a song for a group of highly talented, similarly genre-fluid musicians in an instrumentation that felt much closer to the non-classical world I grew up in, and it seemed only fitting that I should use the musical materials of my youth as directly as I could as a way to reach back to my younger self across time, reflect on the journey that brought me here, and remind myself that none of us know where the journey will end.

Mother

I. Mother's Mouth

Music by Ted Hearne
Text by Chana Porter

II. Stones don't lie

Music and Text by Rohan Chander

Program Note

JB: If I love you, I can't lie to you–
NG: Of course you can lie to me! And you will... cause what the hell do I care about the truth I care that you're there. Like Billie Holiday said, hush now, don't explain.
JB: Alright I accept that.
NG: Of course, of course you'll lie to me... cause I love you I get the least of you, I get the very minimum. You know, fake it with me."

excerpt of a conversation between James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni

I. Mother's Mouth

When mother talks, do you listen?
What do you hear when mother talks?
Children gather, mother's mouth is open
And the words
The words are falling out like stones

Tell me
Crumb of sunset, slice of sky
Children, are you grateful to be alive?
Mother's mouth is open
And the words
The words are falling out like stones

Reason's cherry, answer's picked.
The world is turning, there's no stopping it.
Raise your voices, but not so loud.
Sunflowers grow too tall, get knocked down.

II. stones don't lie

the stones don’t lie
are you grateful
that mothers mouth
is still alive
the stones don’t lie
are you grateful
that mothers mouth
is still alive
the stones don’t lie
your eyes are dry
in mothers cup
the children cry
the stones don’t lie
your eyes are dry
in mothers cup
who is alive

stones!
stones!
stones!
stones!

empty martyrdom
the stars turn in to stone
whatever makes me cry
will always love me so
why won’t you tuck me in
just like the mothers do
lying was easy then
why isn’t loving you?

bared our fathers face
the obvious, the holy trace
fucker ties a lace
so tight
i forget I’m still alive
should I speak no will
of dead who walk within his place
why our house was gold

and roads were made to bear the vain

its fair!
no where!

im scared!
the flares!

that’s fair

whats the difference between my love and yours
when the sweetness on my tongue
scars my toes
when i expect so little
the sky a hue
lie to me
like u do to you
like you do to the few
the proud
the machines
don’t trust your cherry reasons
i need my thirteen

how unlucky it is to love the winding machine
take me sweet
and dance on the trampolines