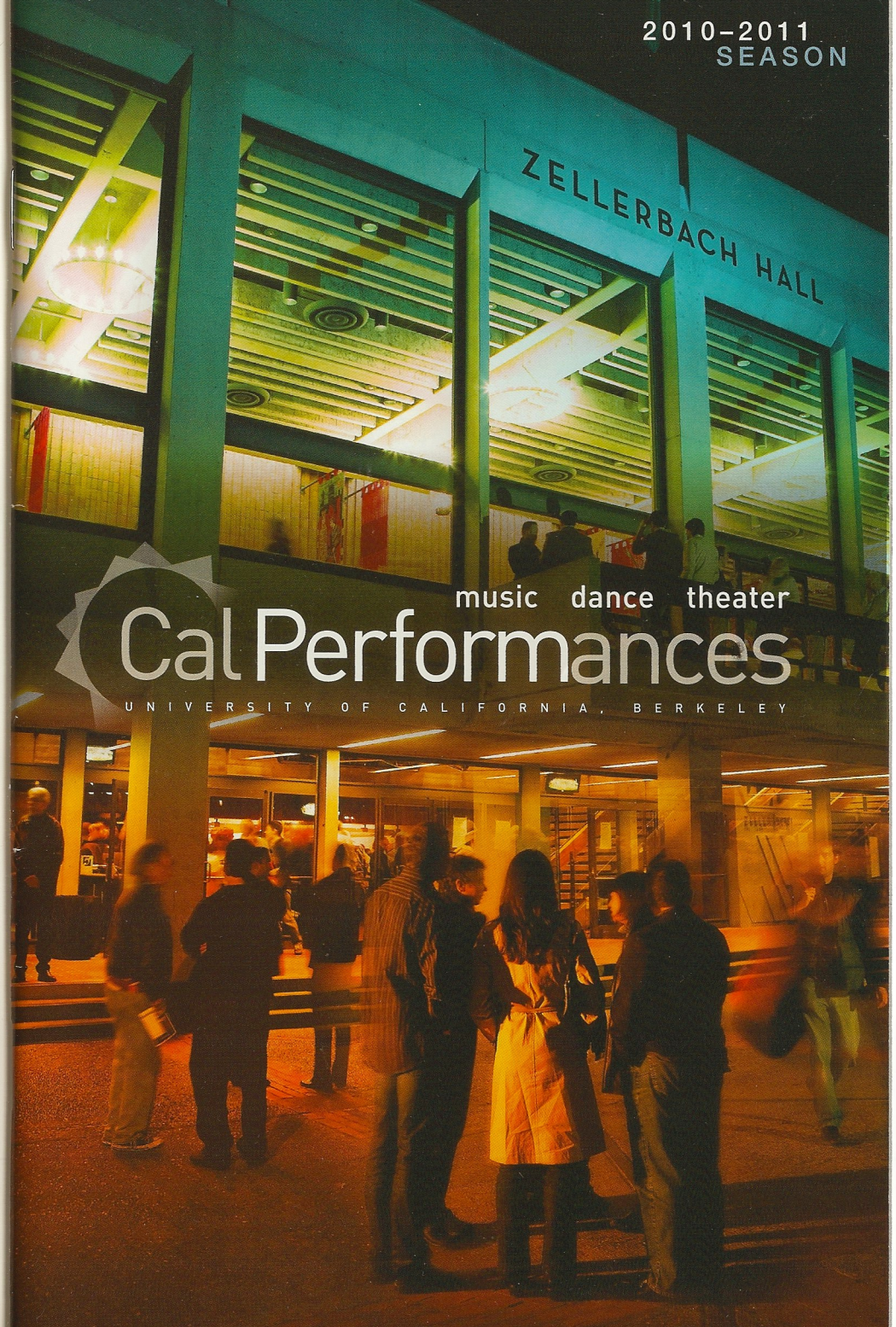


CARNEGIE HALL

March 2011



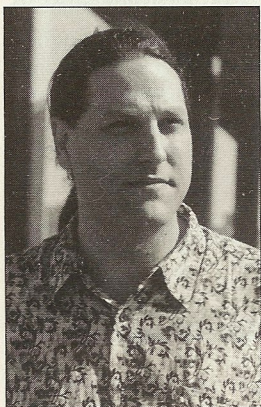
2010-2011
SEASON



MARK GREY (b. 1967)

Ātash Sorushān (Fire Angels) for Soprano, Piano, and Chamber Orchestra

Original libretto by Niloufar Talebi



Premiere:

Composed in 2010, *Ātash Sorushān (Fire Angels)* receives its world premiere at this evening's concert.

A Premiere for the 10th Anniversary of 9/11

That 2011 is a momentous year is an understatement: The 10th anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy brings an array of commemorations, including a remarkable new work commissioned by Carnegie Hall, Cal Performances, and Meet the Composer. *Ātash Sorushān (Fire Angels)* is a work of great power and originality whose creators hope to build bridges to greater understanding and to invite reflection on the decade following a day none of us will ever forget.

About Mark Grey, Niloufar Talebi, and Ensemble Meme

Originally from San Francisco, Mark Grey made his Carnegie Hall debut as a composer with the Kronos Quartet in 2003. His solo, ensemble, and orchestral music has been performed in such venues as the Sydney Opera House, Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, the Barbican Centre in London, and Het Muziektheater in Amsterdam, as well as the Ravinia, Cabrillo, Other Minds, Perth International, and Spoleto festivals. His work *Enemy Slayer: A Navajo Oratorio* was written when he was composer-in-residence with the Phoenix Symphony for its 2007–2008 season, and has been recorded on Naxos. Earlier this month, a new work, *Mugunghwa (Rose of Sharon)*, based on a Korean subject, had its premiere at the Walt Disney Concert Hall with violinist Jennifer Koh and the Los Angeles Master Chorale and chamber orchestra. Grey was commissioned by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in January 2011 to write a fanfare for orchestra, and will create another large work for the orchestra in 2013, in addition to a new work for the Los Angeles Philharmonic that same year. For more than two decades, Grey has worked with composer-performers John Adams, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Kronos Quartet as a sound designer. His creations have been seen

and heard throughout most major concert halls, theaters, and opera houses worldwide.

Mark Grey's collaborator in this project is Niloufar Talebi, born in London to Iranian parents. Her works as writer, award-winning translator, and multimedia artist include an anthology of poetry in translation entitled *Belonging: New Poetry by Iranians Around the World* (North Atlantic Books, 2008); a DVD of poetry videos, *Midnight Approaches* (2006); and the theater works *Four Springs* (2004), *ICARUS/RISE* (2007), and *The Persian Rite of Spring* (2010).

The Ensemble Meme takes its name from the word *meme*, an idea virus that enters the culture and transforms it through its presence. Some memes survive the test of time, while others are revealed as being merely trends. Ensemble Meme strives to create programs in which audiences experience how the music of significant composers from the past influences how we hear contemporary music, and vice-versa. While "love and life" is admittedly a very broad category, all three of tonight's works explore this most crucial theme of them all in different ways.

The Story of *Ātash Sorushān*

Ātash Sorushān is a story about love and connection. Its two larger-than-life beings, Mana and Ahsha, dwell in separate realms, each convinced of their supreme power. In an all-out collision, as their mighty outward facades crumble, a transcendent final movement begins with the realization that in our moments of vulnerability, we are one. How can a devastating event between two dominant forces become a Ground Zero for love? How can we better understand our fellow human beings?

The Background of *Ātash Sorushān*

This work brings ancient Eastern traditions in contact with modern and universal concerns. *Mana*

Fire Angels is divided into four scenes in which electronic soundscapes help us differentiate between the two characters.

The poet of the work's final verses mingles Western and Eastern concepts as well as a concern for the highest human values.

is the Oceanic and Persian term for the divine life force that embodies everything, and *Ahsha* is an Avestan term for truth/existence in Zoroastrian theology. (Avestan is an East Iranian language known from its written form in the *Avesta*, the ancient Iranian scriptures.) Fire, considered an agent of truth and an essential component of this venerable religion, is the physical domain of Ahsha, the divine archangel. While Mana and Ahsha are not personified in their traditions, Niloufar Talebi re-imagined them as characters by marrying their philosophical concepts with human characteristics. Talebi's title names have ancient antecedents as well: *Ātash* is the Persian word for fire, essential for the destruction and renewal of Mana, Ahsha, and all that they represent, while *Sorushān* is the plural form of *Sorush* (in the singular, the proper name of a messenger angel, like Gabriel, who presides over the beginning and end of the world, and who fights the demons threatening to extinguish the world's fire, passion, and truth).

Fire Angels is divided into four scenes in which the electronic soundscapes help us differentiate between the two characters. In the first, **Invocation**, we meet "Mana, the beautiful daughter of light" and "Ahsha, son of ancient empires proud." Mana's sound world is dry and rhythmically firm, while Ahsha's character is marked by more florid vocal writing. In the second scene, **Voyage**, Ahsha speeds across the seas on phoenix wings to his collision with Mana, who chronicles the "roaring hurricane" created by their clash, the "vortex of sound and flesh / In the bright blue morning"—we all remember just such a morning 10 years ago.

As we move closer to the **Transformation**, both angels realize that "shadows within" made them abandon the nurture of life (Mana) and the oath of rightness (Ahsha), and both resolve to go back to the cradle of being to begin anew in loving union; we hear their sonic worlds superimpose. By the **Restoration**, the musical language of the two characters is united in a celebration of "the tenacity of our transforming souls." In this final scene, we hear an excerpt from the "Hymns to the

Earth" in the *Avesta* and, at the close, a verse in Persian by the Iranian modernist poet Sohrab Sepehri (1928–1980), as translated by Niloufar Talebi and included in the original libretto. Sepehri's poetry mingled Western concepts with Eastern in poetry marked by great concern for the highest human values: This is a perfect final quotation for *Fire Angels*.

—Susan Youens

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Don't miss ...

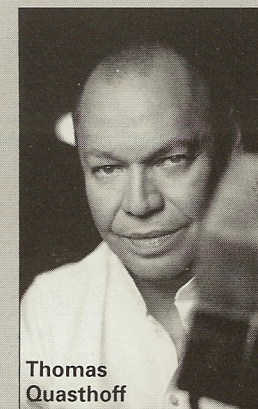
Monday, April 25 at 8 PM
Stern Auditorium / Perelman Stage

Sylvia Schwartz, Soprano
Bernarda Fink, Mezzo-Soprano
Michael Schade, Tenor
Thomas Quasthoff, Bass-Baritone

Malcolm Martineau, Piano
Justus Zeyen, Piano

SCHUMANN *Spanische Liebeslieder*, Op. 138
BRAHMS *Liebeslieder-Walzer*, Op. 52; "An die Heimat";
"Der Abend"; "O schöne Nacht"; "Abendlied"; *Neue Liebeslieder-Walzer*, Op. 65

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Thomas Quasthoff

Harald Hoffmann / DG