

Cycles of My Being

COMPOSED BY **Tyshawn Sorey**
LYRICS BY **Terrance Hayes**

Lawrence Brownlee TENOR
Myra Huang PIANO

FEBRUARY 22, 2018

Lyric
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Chicago Premiere

Cycles of My Being

Music by Tyshawn Sorey

Text by Terrance Hayes

Lawrence Brownlee, *tenor*

Myra Huang, *piano*

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CYCLES OF MY BEING

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LAWRENCE BROWNLEE, *tenor*

MYRA HUANG, *piano*

February 22, 2018, 7:00 p.m.

DuSable Museum of African American History

- I. Inhale, Exhale
- II. Hope (pt. 1)
- III. Whirlwind
- IV. Hate
- V. Hope (pt. 2)
- VI. Each Day I Rise, I Know

Intermission

Gaetano Donizetti	<i>La fille du régiment</i> , "Ah, mes amis"
Donizetti	<i>L'elisir d'amore</i> , "Una furtiva lagrima"
Irving Gordon	"Unforgettable"
Hoagy Carmichael (music)	"The Nearness of You"
Ned Washington (lyrics)	
Traditional	"Every Time I Feel the Spirit"
Traditional	"All Night, All Day"



Stage Manager

Rachel C. Henneberry

Cover photo of Lawrence Brownlee by Shervin Lainez

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TYSHAWN SOREY

Newark-born multi-instrumentalist and composer Tyshawn Sorey is celebrated for his virtuosity, mastery, and memorization of highly complex scores, and an extraordinary ability to blend composition and improvisation in his work. He has performed nationally and internationally with his own ensembles, as well as artists such as John Zorn, Vijay Iyer, Roscoe Mitchell, Muhal Richard Abrams, Wadada Leo Smith, Marilyn Crispell, George Lewis, Claire Chase, Steve Coleman, Steve Lehman, Robyn Schulkowsky, Evan Parker, Anthony Braxton, and Myra Melford, among many others.

Cycles of My Being, addressing themes associated with Black Lives Matter, was supported by Carnegie Hall's 125 Commissions Project in partnership with Opera Philadelphia. Sorey has also received support for his creative projects from The Jerome Foundation, The Shifting Foundation, and Van Lier Fellowship. The Spektral Quartet, Ojai Music Festival, and International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) have commissioned his works, which exemplify a penchant for a thorough exploration of the intersection between improvisation and composition. Sorey also collaborates regularly with ICE as a percussionist and resident composer. Future commissions include a residency at the Berlin Jazz Festival.

Sorey has released six critically acclaimed recordings that feature his work as a composer, multi-instrumentalist, and conceptualist, including his latest, *Verisimilitude* (Pi Recordings, 2017). In 2012, he was selected as one of nine composers for the Other Minds Festival, where he exchanged ideas with such like-minded peers as Ikue Mori, Ken Ueno, and Harold Budd. In 2013, JazzDanmark invited him to serve as the Danish International Visiting Artist. He was a 2015 recipient of the Doris Duke Impact Award.

Sorey has taught and lectured on composition and improvisation at Columbia University, The New School, The Banff Centre, Wesleyan University, International Realtime Music Symposium, Hochschule für Musik Köln, Berklee College of Music, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, and The Danish Rhythmic Conservatory. His work has been premiered at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival, Ojai Music Festival, The Kitchen, Walt Disney Hall, Roulette, Issue Project Room, and the Stone.

Sorey recently received his doctor of musical arts degree from Columbia University. In the fall of 2017, he assumed the role of assistant professor of composition and creative musics at Wesleyan University, where he received his master's degree in composition in 2011.



TERRANCE HAYES

Terrance Hayes is a 2014 MacArthur Fellow. His most recent poetry collection is *How To Be Drawn* (2015). His previous collection, *Lighthouse* (2010), was winner of the 2010 National Book Award and finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and Hurston-Wright Award. Hayes's other honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, and a profile in *The New York Times Magazine*. His first book, *Muscular Music* (1999), won both a Whiting Writers Award and the Kate Tufts Discovery Award. His second book, *Hip Logic* (2002), was a National Poetry Series selection and a finalist for both the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award and the James Laughlin Award from the Academy of American Poets. *Wind In a Box* (2006), a Hurston-Wright Legacy Award finalist, was named one of the best books of 2006 by *Publishers Weekly*. He is the current poetry editor for *The New York Times Magazine* and has two forthcoming manuscripts, *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin* (Penguin, 2018), and *To Float in the Space Between: Drawings and Essays in Conversation with Etheridge Knight* (Wave, 2018).

Hayes was guest editor of *The Best American Poetry 2014* (Scribner, 2014), the preeminent annual anthology of contemporary American poetry. His works have appeared in ten editions of the series since 2005. Poems have also appeared in two editions of the *Pushcart Best of the Small Presses* anthology of poetry. Hayes has read his poetry and lectured in venues including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Princeton University, Yale University, The Boys Club of New York, and the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival. He has visited high schools and also conducted poetry workshops at prisons across America.

Hayes was born in Columbia, South Carolina, and educated at Coker College, where he studied painting and English and was an Academic All-American on the men's basketball team. After receiving his M. F. A. from the University of Pittsburgh, he taught in southern Japan, Columbus, Ohio, and New Orleans, Louisiana. Hayes then returned to Pittsburgh and taught for 12 years at Carnegie Mellon University. He is a Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh. From 2016 to 2018 he will be Distinguished Writer in Residence at New York University.



LAWRENCE BROWNLEE

The renowned American tenor, currently starring as Arturo/*I puritani* at Lyric Opera of Chicago, made a sensational debut with the company two seasons ago as Ramiro/*Cinderella*. He returned last season for the title role/*Charlie Parker's Yardbird* (a role he created in Philadelphia and reprised in New York and London) and a duo recital with bass-baritone Eric Owens.

Brownlee has performed with nearly every leading international opera house and festival, as well as major orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Academia di Santa Cecilia, Boston Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, and the Bavarian Radio Orchestra. Named 2017 “Male Singer of the Year” by both the International Opera Awards and Bachtrack, the tenor serves as artistic advisor at Opera Philadelphia, helping the company to expand its repertoire, diversity efforts and community initiatives.

Among the opera companies where Brownlee has triumphed are the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, the Bavarian State Opera, the Royal Opera, the Vienna Staatsoper; Brussels’s Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, the major houses of Paris, Zurich, Berlin, Barcelona, and Madrid, and the Salzburg and Baden-Baden festivals.

Highlighting Brownlee’s current season is *Cycles of My Being*, composed by Tyshawn Sorey to texts by Terrance Hayes, commissioned by Opera Philadelphia, Carnegie Hall, and Lyric Unlimited. Following the Philadelphia world premiere on February 20 and the Chicago premiere, it will be performed by Brownlee in San Francisco, Utah, Portland, Boston, Princeton, New York (Carnegie Hall), Virginia and Michigan

The season started with a run of Rossini operas, beginning with his house debut at Barcelona’s Gran Teatre del Liceu in *Il viaggio a Reims*, followed by *The Barber of Seville* at the Zurich Opera House and *Semiramide* at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, before returning to Zurich for *Le Comte Ory*. Following Lyric’s *I puritani*, Brownlee will appear in *Der Rosenkavalier* with the Bayerische Staatsoper (including a concert performance at Carnegie Hall), and then *Don Pasquale* at the Opéra National de Paris.

The tenor’s latest solo album, *Allegro Io Son*, received a Critic’s Choice from *Opera News*, among numerous other accolades, and followed his previous Grammy-nominated CD,

Virtuoso Rossini Arias. Brownlee’s opera and concert recordings include *The Barber of Seville* (Bavarian Radio Orchestra), *Armida* (Met), Rossini’s *Stabat Mater* (Academia di Santa Cecilia), and *Carmina Burana* (Berlin Philharmonic). He also released a disc of African-American spirituals, *Spiritual Sketches*.

Brownlee is the fourth of six children and first discovered music when he learned to play bass, drums, and piano at his family’s church in Youngstown, Ohio. He received a master of music degree from Indiana University and went on to win a Grand Prize in the 2001 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Alongside his singing career, Brownlee is an avid salsa dancer and an accomplished photographer, specializing in artist portraits of his onstage colleagues. A die-hard Pittsburgh Steelers and Ohio State football fan, Brownlee has sung the National Anthem at numerous NFL games. He is a champion for autism awareness through the organization Autism Speaks, and he is a lifetime member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., a historically black fraternity committed to social action and empowerment.



MYRA HUANG

Grammy®-nominated pianist Myra Huang performs in recitals and chamber music concerts around the world. She is highly sought after for her interpretation of lieder and art song, and was most recently presented at Carnegie Hall, London’s Wigmore Hall,

The Schubert Club, and The Park Avenue Armory in New York.

Huang has served on the music staffs of the Washington National Opera, Houston Grand Opera, New York City Opera, and the Palau De Les Arts in Valencia, Spain. She is a staff pianist for the Operalia competition, directed by Plácido Domingo, bringing performances at opera houses around the world, including Teatro Alla Scala in Milan, the Royal Opera House in London, and the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing. She is a visiting staff member of various young-artist programs throughout the U.S. Regular recital partners include Nicholas Phan, Lawrence Brownlee, Eric Owens, and Susanna Phillips.

Huang is an avid recording artist, and her album *Gods and Monsters* with tenor Nicholas Phan was nominated for “Best Classical Vocal Solo Album” at the 2018 Grammy Awards. Previous critically acclaimed albums are *Winter Words*, *Still Falls the Rain*, and *Paysages* with soprano Susanna Phillips.

Lyric Unlimited, a division of Lyric Opera of Chicago, offers a multifaceted program of education, community engagement and artistic initiatives. The purpose of Lyric Unlimited is to provide a relevant cultural service to communities throughout the Chicago area, including communities for whom opera and opera companies have been largely irrelevant; to explore a wide range of ways in which Lyric can collaborate with cultural and community organizations throughout the area; and to advance the development of opera, exploring ways in which opera as an art form can resonate more powerfully, and in a range of different ways, with people of multiple backgrounds, ethnicities, and interests.

CYCLES OF MY BEING

I think of this as a project wherein the voices of black men combine to create a new and magical expression of black manhood. This, at least, is my impression after working with Larry Brownlee to shape the cycle’s arc. We had long, rich conversations about masculinity and blackness. Larry wrote the wonderful cycle parts "IV. Hate" and "V. Hope (pt. 2)" amid our conversations about the project. The other works in the cycle are adapted from a series of sonnets I wrote during the first 200 days of the Trump presidency. They cover a range of feelings and topics and will be in a forthcoming manuscript, *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin*, (Penguin, 2018).

Here the sonnets have been rewritten (sometimes dramatically so) as songs that maintain the lyrical core of the poems. New pieces include “Each Day I Rise, I Know,” which I based on

a passage from a poem Larry wrote. His lines reminded me of Maya Angelou. The piece that begins, “When sleeping hope is a swagger” is the result of later conversations with Larry about ending the cycle with a gesture of hope. After writing it, I asked Larry to write a poem using the same structure. Initially I thought we might combine the two, but after reading Larry’s piece, I thought we should end the cycle with it. It brings the cycle to a conclusion of unity and hope. Once Tyshawn Sorey’s music is added, our voices will constitute a unique and moving cycle of expression.

— Terrance Hayes

The ideas, themes and experiences that make up *Cycles of My Being* have been on my mind for quite some time. As I’ve watched men of color endure undeserved aggression, incarceration, brutality, and even death, I’ve been forced to consider my thoughts and questions around what it means to be a black man in America today, and how we as a people are viewed and treated.

Working with Terrance Hayes and Tyshawn Sorey – two extraordinarily insightful and talented black men at the pinnacle of their respective art forms – has allowed each of us to bring our different perspectives to this piece, and to find a common ground in both our shared cultural history and the unique individual

paths that have brought us to this point. Together, we have tried to create something that speaks to the day-to day life of a black man in the United States, and the thoughts and questions he experiences as he moves through the world.

These are divided times. But the goal of this piece is neither to widen those rifts, nor to re-open old wounds; the goal is foster mutual respect, understanding, and communication across races and generations. History unfolds in cycles, and with this work, we hope to balance the stark challenges of our present reality with a resolute resilience, and an unwavering hope for a better future.

— Lawrence Brownlee

TEXTS

I. Inhale, Exhale

America – I hear you hiss and stare
 Do you love the air in me, as I love the air in you?
 Black boxes of cargo
 Black boxes in holes
 Hysteria, Hysteria – I hear you hiss and stare
 Black eyes and blackouts
 Blackjacks and nightmares
 America – do you care for me, as I care for you?
 Do you love the air in me, as I love the air in you?

II. Hope (pt. 1)

When walking hope is a swagger
 When breathing hope is oxygen
 When drunk hope is wine
 When dirty hope is water
 When unfilled hope is a well
 When unwell hope is medicine
 When impatient hope is patience
 When lonely hope is company
 When poor hope is money
 When hungry hope is meat
 When hunted hope is a knife
 When sleeping hope is a lullaby
 When angry hope is a blade
 When wounded hope is what heals me.

III. Whirlwind

Lord, I'm trying to break myself open; this song of mine wants to be a whirlwind.
 You are both religion and assassin.
 I am both assassin and religion.
 My armor is made of flesh and spirit. I am your story.
 I am your lyric.
 Lord, I'm trying to break free of prison; this song of mine must become a weapon.
 You are both compass and situation.
 I am blindness, rumor, insight, vision.
 My courage is made of flesh and spirit. I am your story.
 I am your lyric.
 Lord, I'm trying to break free again.
 This song of mine is made of love and skin.
 This song of mine must become a weapon.
 This song must become a whirlwind.

IV. Hate

Tell me, what causes one to hate?
 Hate takes on many shapes.
 It is subtle, overt, passive, often wrapped in disguise.
 Hate wears white sheets, black suits, high heels, and boots.
 Hate is powerful, all encompassing, and enrapturing.
 Tell me, could it be that you hate me because you hate yourself?
 The very essence of me you despise.
 But why, when I am in the stage your ancestors helped create?
 ...and that, being magnified, only breeds more hate.
 You don't know me. Still you hate me.
 Your contempt for me does not allow you to see me for who I am.
 I am God's creation, flesh personified, in His image.
 You hate the God in me, and the God awful too.
 You don't know me. Still you jeer me.
 Your hate becomes a shackle you cannot break.
 You nor I are born with hate, but hate flourished because you chose to cultivate your hatred.
 Your hate lies in wait until you choose to activate hate.
 Make no mistake, hate leaves carnage in its wake.
 I hate that your hate can decide my own fate.

V. Hope (pt. 2)

When weary hope is a hymn
 When uninspired hope is vision
 When perplexed hope is reason
 When unsettled hope is peace
 When lost hope is direction
 When frustrated hope is calm
 When unsure hope is certainty
 When worried hope is serenity
 When betrayed hope is forgiveness
 When depleted hope is reserve
 When dancing hope becomes grace
 When fatigued hope is a second wind
 When dead hope is life

VI. Each Day I Rise, I Know

Each day I rise, place foot to floor the weight of consciousness I know.

Each day I rise, I know...to always say hello.
 Sun glow tooth-snow hair flow
 Mirror blows a flute of crows
 Each morning glow at the window

I have something to praise
 Sunbreak toothpaste hair glaze
 Mirror gaze a flute of blue jays
 Moaning, amazing & misbehaving
 Each day I rise, I know

I have something to love
 Sun-dusk toothbrush hairbrush
 Mirror blush a flute of thrushes
 Each day I rise, I know

Lyric
