



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Media Contact:

Jamie Sherman

312.334.2469

jsherman@harristheaterchicago.org

WORLD PREMIERE of Provocative Kronos
Quartet Commission, *My Lai*
With Rinde Eckert, tenor, and Vân-Ánh Vanessa Võ,
Vietnamese instrumentalist; composed by Jonathan
Berger



*Pictured: Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson,
May 1968 (photo courtesy of Trent Angers)*

CHICAGO – The world premiere of the staged version of ***My Lai***, Harris Theater’s brand new commission for the **Kronos Quartet** composed by **Jonathan Berger**, will make its debut on **Friday, January 29 at 7:30 PM**. After outstanding reviews at the concert premiere of *My Lai* at Stanford University in October, the Harris looks forward to welcoming this deeply emotional and important story to Chicago.

My Lai approaches the My Lai massacre through the memory and imagination of Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, Jr., the American Army helicopter pilot who intervened in the events in which American G.I.s killed over 500 Vietnamese villagers, including many women and children.

Hugh Thompson became a passionate and devoted witness of the events of that day, and his testimony in 1970 became critical for the Army's investigations and prosecution of guilty parties. Thirty years later, Thompson, Lawrence Colburn, and (posthumously) Glenn Andreotta were awarded the Soldier's Medal for their actions.

"I was in high school when [journalist] Seymour Hersh's revelations about My Lai first came to light," composer Jonathan Berger [recalled to the *Chicago Sun-Times*](#). "Now, working on this new piece for Kronos, I looked at my students [at Stanford] and thought: Thompson and his crew were just kids of your age when they were put into this situation in Vietnam. And telling the story of what they did is of great ethical and social importance. Thompson never felt he was a hero. He was a true patriot, who continued to work for the military, and then in veteran affairs. And I think he died still filled with ambivalent feelings and frustration."

Thompson grappled with a devastating moral dilemma between following orders, and following his heart. **The passionate portrayal of these events through music forces audiences to ask themselves the question: what would you have done?** Obviously Thompson decided to take action to help end the massacre, but dozens did not. It begs the question, when do you step in? When do you speak up? **What would you have done?**

Dramatizing Thompson's experience, with a libretto by **Harriet Scott Chessman**, engages audiences in the human story at the center of this historic event. *My Lai* is more than just a reflection on a particular day, war, or time: it challenges audiences to consider the consequences of human action and inaction, on the scale of society as a whole, and of a single human life.

"Music and the arts are created to make you think, and to express something of importance. *My Lai* personifies both of these ideas and has audiences confronting their own morality," said **Michael Tiknis, President and Managing Director of Harris Theater**. "The music is incredible, evoking such strong emotion while transporting you straight to this particular time, and even more vividly, this specific place: 1968, Vietnam. We are proud to have commissioned such a truly important work of a story that simply has not been told enough; that of the unsung hero who changed history."

In addition to the world premiere performance, the Harris Theater will host two events the same evening, which will deepen the audience's experience of this powerful work:

Pre-Performance Lecture by Scott D. Sagan: "The Legacy of My Lai" – 6:00 PM

Scott Sagan, Professor of Political Science at Stanford University and an expert in use of force, weapons proliferation, and security in South Asia, will conduct a pre-performance lecture on the historical and political context of My Lai, setting the stage for the world premiere.

Post-Performance Conversation with the Artists

Following the performance, the composer, artists and director will return to the stage to engage in a conversation exploring the inspiration and creative process behind the staged work.

About the Artists:

For more than 40 years, the **Kronos Quartet**—**David Harrington** (violin), **John Sherba** (violin), **Hank Dutt** (viola), and **Sunny Yang** (cello)—has pursued a singular artistic vision, combining a spirit of fearless

exploration with a commitment to continually re-imagining the string quartet experience. In the process, Kronos has become one of the most celebrated and influential groups of their time, performing thousands of concerts worldwide, releasing more than 50 recordings of extraordinary breadth and creativity, collaborating with many of the world's most intriguing and accomplished composers and performers, and commissioning more than 850 works and arrangements for string quartet. In 2011, Kronos became the only recipients of both the Polar Music Prize and the Avery Fisher Prize, two of the most prestigious awards given to musicians. The group's numerous awards also include a Grammy for Best Chamber Music Performance (2004) and "Musicians of the Year" (2003) from Musical America.

Jonathan Berger is widely regarded as one of the foremost living composers. His works include orchestral, chamber, vocal, choral and electro-acoustic music. He has been commissioned by some of today's most exciting chamber ensembles and has enjoyed commissions and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Bourges Festival, Westdeutscher Rundfunk and Chamber Music America. Berger lives in California where he teaches and does research at Stanford University.

Harriet Scott Chessman is a fiction writer, the author of the acclaimed novels *Someone Not Really Her Mother*, *The Beauty of Ordinary Things*, *Lydia Cassatt Reading the Morning Paper*, and *Ohio Angels*. Her fiction has been on the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Best Books list and featured on *Good Morning, America* and in *The New York Times*, in addition to being translated into ten languages. She has taught creative writing and literature at Yale University (where she gained her PhD in English), Bread Loaf School of English, and Stanford University. This is her first libretto.

With a virtuosic command of gesture, language and song, **Rinde Eckert** moves beyond the boundaries of what a 'play,' a 'dance piece,' an 'opera' or 'musical' might be, in the service of grappling with complex issues. Eckert was named an inaugural Doris Duke Artist in 2012, won a Grammy for Best Small Ensemble Performance as a collaborator on the album *Lonely Motel* on Cedille Records in 2011, and was a finalist for Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2007.

Van-Anh Vanessa Vo devotes her life-long passion and mastery of the dan tranh zither to the creation of distinctive music blended with a cultural essence that can only come from this unique Vietnamese instrument. Among her accomplishments are the 2009 Emmy® Award-winning soundtrack for the documentary "Bolinao 52", which she co-composed and recorded, and the soundtrack for the Sundance best documentary and 2003 Academy Awards® nominee "Daughter from Danang". Van-Anh also co-composed and recorded for the recent documentary "A Village Called Versailles", winner of the New Orleans Film Festival Audience Award.

Creative Team

Jonathan Berger, composer

Harriet Scott Chessman, librettist

Kronos Quartet

David Harrington, violin

John Sherba, violin

Hank Dutt, viola

Sunny Yang, cello

Rinde Eckert, vocalist

Vân-Ánh Võ, t'rưng, đàn bầu, đàn tranh

Mark DeChiazza, Rinde Eckert, directors/set designers

Mark DeChiazza, video projections designer

Brian H. Scott, lighting designer
Drew Cameron, creative consultant
Janet Cowperthwaite, producer
Kronos Performing Arts Association, production management

Single tickets now available at www.HarrisTheaterChicago.org or by calling the Harris Theater Box Office at 312.334.7777.

••• All programs, prices, and dates are subject to change •••

Sponsorship

My Lai (music by Jonathan Berger, libretto by Harriet Scott Chessman) was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet, Rinde Eckert, and Vân-Anh Võ by the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, the Laura and Ricardo Rosenkranz Artistic Innovation Fund, and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation through the Imagine campaign, the Gerbode-Hewlett Foundations 2013 Music Commissioning Awards initiative, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Northern Trust Company is the Harris Theater's 2015–2016 season sponsor. United Airlines is the Official Airline of the Harris Theater. Hyatt Regency Chicago is the Harris Theater's season hotel partner. The Theater gratefully acknowledges the Irving Harris Foundation for its leadership support of the Presenting Fund. The Harris Theater is partially supported by the Illinois Arts Council Agency. All performances take place on the Elizabeth Morse Genius Stage at the Harris Theater.

About Harris Theater for Music and Dance

The Harris Theater's primary mission is to partner with an array of Chicago's music and dance performing arts organizations to help them build the resources and infrastructure necessary to achieve artistic growth and long-term organizational sustainability. The Harris Theater's original group of 12 resident companies has grown to include 35 diverse organizations. Through these partnerships, the Theater has earned national recognition as a distinctive model for collaboration, performance, and artistic advancement.

Opened on November 8, 2003, the Harris Theater for Music and Dance was the first multi-use performing arts venue to be built in the Chicago downtown area since 1929. Today the Theater continues to host the most diverse offerings of any venue in Chicago, featuring the city's world-renowned music and dance institutions and the Harris Theater Presents series of acclaimed national and international artists and ensembles.

Imagine: The Campaign for Harris Theater, is a \$38.8M comprehensive fundraising effort supporting the Theater's multifaceted mission. The campaign ensures the continued growth and artistic development of the Harris Theater over the next 10 years.

The *Imagine* campaign is led by four transformational gifts: from The Irving Harris Foundation, Joan W. Harris; Alexandra and John Nichols; Chauncey and Marion D. McCormick Family Foundation, Abby McCormick O'Neil and D. Carroll Joynes; Caryn and King Harris, The Harris Family Foundation. Additional leadership gifts supporting programmatic and capital projects have been generously funded by The Crown Family, Jay Franke and David Herro, Jack and Sandra Guthman, The Andrew W. Mellon

Foundation, The Neisser Family Foundation, The Northern Trust Company, Christine and Glenn Kelly, Laura and Ricardo Rosenkranz, and Marilyn and David J. Vitale.

The Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust and Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust are the lead underwriters of fundraising for *Imagine: The Campaign for Harris Theater*.

The Harris Theater maintains a commitment to engaging Chicago residents of all ages and communities. Programs like the popular *Eat to the Beat* and *Exelon Family Series* advance access to, and understanding of, the performing arts. The Theater partners with health and human service agencies, K-12 schools, and community arts organizations, providing more than 8,800 underwritten performance tickets through the *Access Tickets Program* since 2009. The Theater also connects gifted young artists and students to presented artists through master classes, artist talks, and other enrichment activities.

To learn more about the Harris Theater, please visit HarrisTheaterChicago.org. Call the Box Office at 312.334.7777 to request a brochure or additional information.

The Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Chicago's state-of-the art 1,525-seat performance venue, can also be found on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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