

INHERITANCES

ADAM TENDLER, PIANO

TUE. 7:30 PM
MAY 7

The Menil Collection

Laurie Anderson (b. 1947)

Remember, I Created You (2022)

Missy Mazzoli (b. 1980)

Forgiveness Machine (2022)

Scott Wollschleger (b. 1980)

Outsider Song (2022)

Angélica Negrón (b. 1981)

You Were My Age (2022)

John Glover (b. 1983)

In The City of Shy Hunters (2022)

Mary Prescott

What It Becomes (2022)

Timo Andres (b. 1985)

An Open Book (2022)

Ted Hearne (b. 1982)

Inheritance (2021)

inti figgis-vizueta (b. 1993)

hushing (2022)

Sarah Kirkland Snider (b. 1973)

the plum tree i planted still there (2022)

Christopher Cerrone (b. 1984)

Area of Refuge (2022)

Marcos Balter (b. 1974)

False Memories (2022)

Pamela Z (b. 1956)

Thank You So Much (2022)

Darian Donovan Thomas (b. 1993)

We don't need to tend this garden. They're wildflowers. (2022)

Nico Muhly (b. 1981)

Eiris, Sones (2022)

Devonté Hynes (b. 1985)

Morning Piece (2022)

Tonight's concert will be performed without intermission.

THE DACAMERA AT THE MENIL SERIES IS UNDERWRITTEN BY LOUISA STUDE SAROFIM.

My Father's Death, an Envelope of Cash, a Legacy in Music

The first time a photo of me appeared in *The New York Times*, my father sent a thumbs-up emoji. So my sister told me a month later at his burial.

She'd sent him an article over Facebook. I didn't know he saw it, or that he knew about the piano recital the article covered. At the time of his death, we saw each other in person maybe once a year, during the holidays, and talked three times over the phone—his birthday, my birthday, Father's Day—though there had been times in recent years when I didn't know his phone number or email address. Both changed unpredictably. Still, our interactions were always warm, if brief. We weren't estranged but seemed to lack the impulse to stay in touch; I often wondered if that was the one thing we had in common. I found it comforting.

So, when I received a call at home in Brooklyn from my stepmother, telling me he'd died in their living room in New Hampshire, I felt mostly confused, as if there had been some mistake. It was as if he'd decided to move to another planet without telling me. I spent my whole life with him absent in some sense, even if in my childhood, particularly the decade after my parents' divorce, he was still sporadically present. But now, my *access* to him was gone.

In the days surrounding his funeral, I felt like a stage manager, helping with logistics and family mediations. I wandered my hometown in Vermont, visiting our old haunts: a waterfall where we fished, the Burger King where my family had gone for special Sunday dinners, our old house, with blueberry bushes that he planted, still there. The day of his burial, I returned to Brooklyn. That night, I cried in the kitchen, partly for my dad, but mostly because I didn't want that terrible day to end. It would mean moving forward and leaving behind an event that I wasn't even sure I had experienced.

An inheritance was the last thing on my mind. My dad was financially ambiguous and notoriously frugal, so I thought that if there even was one, it would be weird. I was right. Around Christmas, my stepmother told me that, along with provisions like bottled water, my father had stored and hidden three wads of cash for my two sisters and me as our inheritance.

On New Year's Day, while in Vermont, I arranged to meet her and my half-brother at a Denny's on the New Hampshire border, just a few steps from the McDonald's where I was transferred between parents as a kid. I was handed a manila envelope full of cash. Even if I'd never held

that amount of cash before, it was a sum that could disappear easily into a couple months of rent and bills in New York City.

Would that be my father's legacy?

A few weeks later, I attended a show at Roulette in Brooklyn. While I was sitting alone in the balcony, my usual perch, something happened. The music just hit me. I know that sounds corny, but it's true. I thought to myself, This is why I'm alive. Music. Alive. It was an epiphany. The ideas collided and a whole project manifested in an instant: I would use my inheritance to commission a program of new piano works about inheritance itself—a project that arrives at the 92nd Street Y, New York, on March 11.

I drafted an email to some of my dearest friends, who also happen to be brilliant composers. Admitting I had very little idea what I was doing, I wrote a message that read in part:

In October my father died. It was unexpected and the circumstances aren't entirely clear. ... We had a close relationship in my childhood which grew more distant, or perhaps just quieter, for a number of reasons, loss of love not among them. ... I know [this] is more a favor than a commission. ... If you do accept, I trust your instincts [to take] the piece in any direction you choose. ... The only thing I ask is that you let me live with these works until I find them a home, together—somewhere.

Everyone said yes, among them Nico Muhly, Missy Mazzoli, Christopher Cerrone, Pamela Z, Ted Hearne, Sarah Kirkland Snider, Timo Andres and John Glover. It was 2020, and I began to dig into the task of finding a presenter just as face coverings began appearing throughout New York. Within a couple weeks, the pandemic had shut down much of the city and any semblance of the performing arts that I knew. All around, there was now a staggering backlog of performances to reschedule, often from much more established artists than me.

I wondered whether I had made a mistake sending that email. Maybe I could've used the money after all. Only toward the end of that first Covid summer, as livestreaming seemed to hit its saturation point and my future as a concert pianist seemed especially uncertain, did I start thinking pragmatically about my still-unnamed project.

The first thing I abandoned was the idea that it had to debut in New York. For years, I'd sent unsolicited pitches to Kate Nordstrum, the founder and director of the Minneapolis-based new music presenter Liquid Music, but this project felt different. It was promising that Kate replied

to my email saying she wanted to talk, but I remember pacing my bedroom during our call. The project had still seemed somewhat hypothetical to me, but in one phone conversation it was being ushered into reality: She said yes, and thought we should bring in more composers.

I wanted to invite more, too, but had already promised away my entire inheritance to those already onboard. This meant finding more money. I hesitated at first, but finally asked for support from Anthony Creamer, a friend and arts patron in Philadelphia whom I'd never asked for anything. He said yes; and we had a show. I had a presenter, a premiere date of spring 2022, and even a name for the project: *Inheritances*.

Those additional composers joined, including Devonté Hynes, Laurie Anderson, Angélica Negrón, inti figgis-vizueta and Mary Prescott. In all, the *Inheritances* program would feature 16 new solo works by 16 composers.

The pieces started trickling in. One of the composers, Scott Wollschleger, wrote to me with a series of questions about my father. "Who was he as a person?" "What about him do you feel is still with you now?" "What was your relationship like and did it evolve over time?" I had always emphasized that I didn't want these pieces to be about my dad, nor for the program to be necessarily about death. Still, if answering Scott's questions would give him an entry point, I'd do it. I wrote sprawling responses and reluctantly shared the document with the rest of the composers. Many of them, to my surprise, used it as a catalyst for their own pieces; it triggered their own memories, their own sense of inheritance and place. Several titles come from the depths of that confessional.

More and more works came in, all of them surprising to me in some way. Each composer seemed to stretch for this project—or, as Andres once put it, "let their freak flag fly." Marcos Balter, in the program note for his piece, *False Memories*, wrote, "You'll see that the musical idiom I've chosen to explore is not my 'usual,' per se."

Often, the composers would share their inspiration with me, and ask that I keep that information between us. Mazzoli's *Forgiveness Machine*, to be played "mechanical and heartbreaking," grinds in the extreme registers of the piano. She declined to provide a program note, telling me the piece spoke for itself.

Laurie Anderson's *Remember, I Created You* used text from an artificial intelligence program she developed, creating an eerily accurate narrative of my entire project. Hynes's *Morning Piece* enters such a space of stillness that I could barely move while listening to his demo on my headphones, riding the B46 bus home. Cerrone wrote *Area of Refuge*, an understated echo chamber of a piece, in the wake of his own father's sudden passing, and dedicated it to his memory.

Nico Muhly adapted John Wycliffe's translation of Proverbs 13:22—about inheritance between fathers and sons, and the balance between righteousness and sin—weaving a melodic line with that text on a middle staff

"not to be sung, but to be played in as *cantabile* a fashion as possible." Pamela Z's *Thank You So Much* has the piano playfully mimicking audio from interviews she found of me speaking about John Cage, but the words could easily have been about my dad, toying with a question I had often asked myself: Did I care to know more about the composers I played than about my own father?

"I had some fun," she wrote, "with intermingling and blurring the lines between those relationships."

In Darian Donovan Thomas's piece, "we don't need to tend this garden. they're wildflowers," designed as a kind of onstage therapy session, I would finally speak about my dad for the first and only time in the program. Through a series of instructions, personal questions and tonal shifts, interspersed with family photos, the score probes the psychological terrain of my relationship with my father, and what it felt like to lose him. I feared at first that this all might be too literal for a program that I intended to be largely symbolic, but the result has become a necessary release for me, an emotional climax and an acknowledgment of the person and event that brought this whole program together.

Inheritances became a kind of sacred space, a gathering, a ritual. I might have been Venmo-ing away my inheritance, but these pieces felt like bereavement gifts sent from friends.

I don't remember much from that Minneapolis premiere, aside from the feeling afterward of fulfillment—a rarity for me. The theater seats remained occupied long after the recital ended. People stayed and talked, to one another and to me. Different pieces touched different people in different ways.

The goal for *Inheritances*, from the start, had been to provide a vessel through which I could connect to my elusive father, process my grief and reconcile with my past. But I also hoped that writing these pieces would provide a similar vessel for the composers, and ultimately that this shared experience would extend to our listeners. When audiences responded so powerfully, in Minneapolis and then a Los Angeles performance co-presented by Liquid Music and the new-music collective Wild Up, I felt like the long road that had begun with a manila envelope in a Denny's parking lot over two years earlier had all been worthwhile.

Now *Inheritances* is having its New York premiere at the 92nd Street Y in a co-presentation with Liquid Music. Many of the composers will hear their works live for the first time, and although I've performed in this city for over a decade, it feels like something of a debut: the most personal, and most important, program I've ever played. I like to think that my dad would be proud. I'd settle for a thumbs-up emoji.

—Adam Tendler

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REMEMBER, I CREATED YOU

Laurie Anderson

Adam: When we first started talking about the kind of piece she might create, I said to Laurie, “forget that you’re writing a piece for me, a concert pianist. Write something as if you were going to play it yourself.” Laurie read dozens of pages of testimony I wrote about my father’s and my complex relationship, and collected photographs of him and us as well. She then shaped the piece by feeding these materials into an A-I program she developed with the Machine Learning Institute, Adelaide Australia. The works Laurie created for *Inheritances* (this one, as well as the text piece, *Sunglasses*) eerily define not only this whole program, but also my father’s and my shared history.

FORGIVENESS MACHINE

Missy Mazzoli

Adam: Missy and I corresponded privately quite a bit leading up to her sending over *Forgiveness Machine*, and I will keep those correspondences private. Before the world premiere in Minneapolis, I asked if she wanted to provide a program note, and she asked if she could pass, adding that she thought the piece “speaks for itself.” I think it does, too. Instead of a traditional tempo marking like *Allegro* or *Vivace*, Missy advises in the score that the piece should be played: “Mechanical and Heartbreaking.”

OUTSIDER SONG

Scott Wollschleger

Outsider Song is a short and intense reflection on the soul-searching journeys we traverse by ourselves. These lonely voyages can seem paradoxical; they are often painful and profoundly healing, and the music of this work bridges desolation and soaring hope as I attempt to honor, in some spiritual sense, both Adam and his late father. This is a song for all who have, at any moment in their own life’s journey, felt like an outsider.

YOU WERE MY AGE

Angélica Negrón

When my grandmother passed away last year, I traveled to Puerto Rico to help my mom clean her home in which my grandmother lived with her. As I was going through old documents, encyclopedias, old magazines, countless medical supplies and stuffed animals I also found old photographs of my mom. In that moment I had a sudden realization of something quite obvious but that I had never thought of before in my life, my mother was once my age. This piece seeks to embody the essence of my perception of my mother when she was my age through the lens of a single image captured a long time ago.

IN THE CITY OF SHY HUNTERS

John Glover

“Things start where you don’t know and end up where you know.

When you know is when you ask.

How did this start?”

–Tom Spanbauer

Having known Adam as a dear friend, colleague and collaborator for over a decade—his act of reaching out to commission works in response to his father’s passing with his inheritance is so characteristically generous, emotionally raw, and blazing with the act of creation. My contribution to this space takes its title from Spanbauer’s novel which seems to connect in ways I both understand and don’t quite know.

WHAT IT BECOMES

Mary Prescott

(From an email to Adam Tandler)

Years ago, after my grandmother died, my father said to me, “When your parents die, that is when you really begin to understand them.” That sort of stuck with me ever since. So much of our identity is wrapped up in our relationships with our parents and their identities, I think. And I don’t want to wait until they have left to know them, and I don’t want to miss them or not know who they are now, in the present. There is so much longing to know oneself and one’s relationships, and then there is also the longing of missing our loved ones when they’ve left us, and the constant wish to have known them better. Yet, the dissonances of any two people are deafening...

Well, I really wanted to mention more about how things “become.” Or how we can’t anticipate what they will become... our relationships, the money from an inheritance, our experiences, our dreams, the border between two states, a few note fragments... So I thought of these things as I wrote this piece for you, and I thought about how you can turn the same thing over and over in your hand, and it looks different from this angle or that, and time changes it, even if it stays the same. And context changes it, how it looks and what it means. How grief passes through us, and we learn to live with it even as there is some guilt in carrying on. How the traits of our ancestors made marks on our parents, and now on us. What it becomes is the ineffable... what we have inherited.

AN OPEN BOOK

Timo Andres

Adam Tandler once commented to me that he is “an open book.” I agreed, and immediately wrote down this thought in case I ever wrote a piece for him.

INHERITANCE

Ted Hearne

Adam: I'll be honest, I was nervous about receiving Ted's piece. His instrumental music can be rhythmically and harmonically complex, and fiendishly difficult to play. So I was pretty astonished when I received *Inheritance*, a piece that could be described as mostly silent, though actually it hangs just on the edge of inaudibility, with slow, soft, lilting phrase interjections that Ted described to me as ideally sounding "underwater." Between extended techniques, counterpoint that includes meticulous releases of different notes at different times, rhythms that are subtle but that Ted wishes to be played strictly in time, and a "bite-switch" that I use for page turns while both of my feet are occupied, Ted managed to compose a still-fiendish, but deeply personal, meditation on inheritance, and a masterclass in restraint.

HUSHING

inti figgis-vizueta

Adam: inti's score for hushing could be seen visually as a map, a menu, even a buffet! I usually do really well when presented with the freedom to make creative choices within a composer's work, but I'll confess that for months I struggled here. When inti described to me their actual process of composing the work, the visceral physicality of their interaction with the piano, it helped to serve as an entry point. And then, after I'd tried a kitchen-sink approach of extended techniques that were variously fussy and unsuccessful, we began to experiment with the idea of integrating video. I had always vowed, almost pridefully, that the *Inheritances* program would feature "no home videos of me at my birthday party" and so on, and yet when I leaned into exactly that level of intimacy, a certain wall fell down and I surrendered to the idea of making *hushing* deeply, almost painfully personal. Not only did the piece transform, but so did the whole program. In terms of the program structure, I think of *hushing* as a kind of gate into the second half of the program, and one of the most important, demanding, and personal pieces in my repertoire.

THE PLUM TREE I PLANTED STILL THERE

Sarah Kirkland Snider

"I went to the house where I grew up, where my dreams still take place, the lawn totally overgrown, the plum tree I planted still there and the blueberry bushes he once planted, once so bountiful that strangers would visit with empty containers to pick them, still separating our property from the next house..." Among the many insights and observations that moved me in Adam's beautiful essay about his father was this vivid image, which lingered in my mind. After losing my own father, I too went to the house in which I grew up, approaching it through the woods that abutted our backyard so that I could catch a glimpse of the Sycamore trees I

climbed and played in while my father did yardwork in his cutoff jeans. There is something both surreal and grounding about visiting natural landscapes from our past. Trees and plants often keep growing even after we abandon them, after our loved ones depart, after we depart. This piece is a short meditation on the singular ache they can inspire.

AREA OF REFUGE

Christopher Cerrone

"As in a dream, there is no release until we wake up, and not because the dream has ended."

—Morton Feldman, note to *The Viola in My Life*

Living for the past month in a hotel in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I kept happening upon signs for an 'area of refuge'—which is a legally mandated location where people can gather in times of emergency. Repeatedly seeing these signs transported me back to a small corner waiting area in the hospital where I recently spent the days waiting upon my father during the last days of his life. The space seemed to symbolize a kind of limbo, a place of waiting, pain, but also refuge. The emotions in my piece reflect this state—suspended, emotionally unclear, and without resolution.

FALSE MEMORIES

Marcos Balter

As for a few thoughts about the piece, you'll see that the musical idiom I've chosen to explore is not my "usual," per se. The concept of 'inheritance' made me think of how we build ourselves from what we believe our past has given to us, even though we often tend to involuntarily modify or even create past memories in order to cope with trauma. What remains, then, is neither purely concrete nor abstract, but something in between that looks and sounds like the past but is in reality very much a portrait of our present selves while looking back at what we imagine our past was like. *False Memories* sounds like my childhood, but it isn't. It sounds like a tune I've heard before, but it isn't. It sounds like music from another time and place, but it isn't. It's my fictionalization of my young self, my re-telling of things to the best of my abilities while also understanding that this recounting is flawed and not necessarily factual because I need it to be so. And, yet these memories exist, regardless of their genesis or factuality, and they are obviously a part of who I am.

THANK YOU SO MUCH

Pamela Z

I wanted to make something using samples of Adam's speaking voice for this commission. But I was very late in getting started on the piece—past the deadline even—so there wasn't time to arrange for an interview with him—not to mention making certain to capture a high-quality recording of his voice. So I had to improvise.

I scoured the Internet for recordings of Adam giving interviews, talks, or introducing works he was about to play. I found and sampled a variety of things—most of which didn't have him close-mic'ed, so there was a lot of reverberant room sound, and I just had to figure out a way to work with that.

Knowing that Adam has come to be known as quite the Cage interpreter, I felt that he probably "inherited" at least as much from him as he did from his father. I had some fun with intermingling and blurring the lines between those relationships. I like to think that my piece amplifies and lovingly toys with some of the inherent ambiguities surrounding the appointed topic.

WE DON'T NEED TO TEND THIS GARDEN. THEY'RE WILDFLOWERS.

Darian Donavan Thomas

Adam: The score to Darian's piece is quite different from the piece that we've developed over the past couple of years. Darian designed the work as a kind of public therapy session, in which I'd answer questions of his devising onstage, unscripted and in real time, while also following his musical cues. I *would* like to actually do this version at some point, and would be quite intrigued by seeing someone *else* do it, too. The current version that we've created, however, ensures that some version of a similar story is told with each performance of the piece. Darian's score is a mix of typed and handwritten instructions, and notation both engraved and in his hand, all surrounded by a collage of my family photos.

EIRIS, SONES

Nico Muhly

Eiris, Sones is a sort of memory-piece, for which I wrote a simple chorale, and set a piece of text from the book of Proverbs (in the Wycliffe translation, from 1382). The pianist is required to play the chorale and the tune at the same time, only imagining the words:

A good man schal leeue aftir him eiris, sones,
and the sones of sones;
and the catel of a synnere is kept to a iust
man.

Our worries about *death taxes* and obsession with primogeniture and family continuity goes back as far as God's covenant with Abraham; No matter how secular a world we inhabit, there remains something fundamentally mystical about the idea of inheritance from fathers to sons. In Genesis, God says, "Biholde thou heuene, and noubre thou sterris, if thou maist. And the Lord seide to Abram, So thi seed schal be."

MORNING PIECE

Devonté Hynes

Adam: *Morning Piece* appeared in my inbox during a rainy commute home one night. The score was accompanied by a 'demo' of Dev himself playing it, and that demo was my first real experience of *Morning Piece*. I'll never forget listening to it on that B46 bus in Brooklyn knowing that this work must close this program—it had to. *Morning Piece* unfolds in three sections, the beginning of each marked by pulsing chords, which indeed appear differently each time. These chords eventually close the piece and fade—though I often use the word "collapse"—into silence.

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