

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**IN NEW YORK CITY at the DIMENNA CENTER
Friday and Saturday JANUARY 20 and 21, 2012**

the Composer in Residence of the Opera Company of Philadelphia

LEMBIT BEECHER

presents

**A PROGRAM OF MUSIC EXPLORING STORYTELLING
AND THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE**

featuring

THE NEW YORK CITY PREMIERE OF

AND THEN I REMEMBER

AN ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY ORATORIO

based on interviews with TAIMI LEPASAAR

and

THE WORLD PREMIERE OF

THREE IMMIGRANT SONGS

A SONG CYCLE ON IMMIGRANT POETRY IN TRANSLATION



Taimi Lepasaar, Ants Lepasaar, from Lepasaar Family Archives

“What set Beecher's work apart? His music, [David] Devan said, has ‘dramatic possibility written into it. For me, I heard a storyteller in the music. His musical vocabulary had a fresh sound to it I hadn't heard before.’ ”

– Peter Dobrin for THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER, Sept. 13, 2011

On FRIDAY, JANUARY 20 and SATURDAY JANUARY 21, 2012, 8pm at New York City's DIMENNA CENTER FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC, Estonian-American composer and current Composer in Residence of the Opera Company of Philadelphia (a residence in partnership with Gotham Chamber Opera and Music-Theatre Group,) **LEMBIT BEECHER** presents a program of his own works, including the world premiere of **THREE IMMIGRANT SONGS**, and the New York City premiere of his acclaimed documentary oratorio, **AND THEN I REMEMBER**.

In both works, Beecher uses the colors and textures of chamber music and the power of the human voice to tell stories of the immigrant experience, with texts ranging from traditional folk song to published poetry, to poems scrawled on the wall of a holding cell, to a first person account of love, war, immense loss and renewal.

And Then I Remember is a documentary oratorio inspired by and threaded through with audio recordings of interviews with Beecher's grandmother, TAIMI LEPASAAR.

Taimi Lepasaar's story begins with her childhood as a young music student in the newly independent country of Estonia. She came of age during World War II, fell in love with ANTS LEPASAAR as the Soviet Army invaded the country, married him and began a family during the subsequent Nazi invasion, and finally fled Estonia with her parents, young daughter (Beecher's mother,) and husband in 1944 as the Soviet army returned and sealed the country's borders. As the refugees made their way west, Ants was impressed into service at a Nazi airplane factory in Poland. The rest of the family continued on to Leipzig and waited for him, in vain – he never appeared, and was likely killed during the Soviet army's advance into Poland. When the war ended, Lepasaar, her parents and children (a second daughter was born not long after Ants was taken from the family,) lived in a displaced persons camp for four years, and then finally moved to the United States. There she found work as a church organist and music teacher, first in Texas and then in Rhode Island, through which she was able to support her whole family and give them a new life in America.

Fifty minutes in length, and scored for solo soprano, chamber ensemble and chorus, and including excerpts of the Estonian national epic, the KALEVIPOEG, **And Then I Remember** embodies not just Lepasaar's journey, but Beecher's attempt to capture the essence of his grandmother's storytelling.

Beecher explains: "To supplement the English language interviews texts, I have set portions of the Estonian national epic, Kalevipoeg, for a female duo and male chorus to sing. Both Kalevipoeg and my grandmother's stories are about a wandering journey of epic nature. Both are permeated by an intense love of homeland, of Estonia, and the ruminations on memory, storytelling and the passage of time that are contained within Kalevipoeg seem to be echoed by my grandmother. I sometimes feel that I understand my grandmother's stories in the way that Estonians of an older generation understood Kalevipoeg. The experiences my grandmother describes are so far removed from mine, in terms of time, place and intensity, that they acquire the sheen of a fantastic saga, yet at the same time, the stories feel so very personal, emotional and deeply true."

Building on this personal story of immigration, Beecher explores larger experiences in a new song cycle, **Three Immigrant Songs**. Set for mezzo-soprano, cello, horn and piano, **Three Immigrant Songs** includes lines from a Greek rebetiko (an early twentieth century folk song,) a Chinese poem written on the wall of the Angel Island immigrant processing and detention center, and an Estonian poem by Marie Under, a refugee who fled the country during the same period as Taimi Lepasaar. Translation is an integral part of the cycle's structure; the lines of the source texts are set throughout the songs in multiple English translations, so that meaning emerges from a multi-faceted view of the original words.

Taken together, these works describe a progression in Beecher's own journey; *And Then I Remember*, written and premiered in 2009, brought Beecher his first national attention, and was elemental in winning his position as the first-ever Composer in Residence of the Opera Company of Philadelphia, and *Three Immigrant Songs* is the first work written under the auspices of this position. The program will also include *Kust tunnen kodu* (How I Recognize my Home) for two sopranos and piano, by the Estonian composer Veljo Tormis.

Composer **Lembit Beecher** (b. 1980) writes music focuses on themes of storytelling, memory, nature and the immigrant experience. Born of Estonian and American parents, Lembit grew up under the redwoods in Santa Cruz, California, a few miles from the wild Pacific. Since then he has lived in Boston, Houston, Ann Arbor, Berlin and New York, earning degrees from Harvard, Rice and the University of Michigan. This varied background has made him particularly sensitive to place, ecology and the strong emotional relationships that people forge with patterns in nature. He is also interested in memory and the various ways we tell stories, from emotional personal narratives to crisp and clean documentaries. Recent pieces have focused on integrating recorded interviews with music. While a fellow at the University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities (2008 – 2009), Lembit wrote *And Then I Remember*, a multi-media, documentary oratorio based on the World War II stories of his grandmother. *And Then I Remember* won the 2010 Opera Vista competition leading to a fully staged production in March of 2011 in Houston, Texas. Active also as a pianist and conductor, his work has been performed at the Tanglewood, Aspen and Cabrillo Music Festivals and he has received awards and grants from the American Music Center, ASCAP, New York Youth Symphony, NewMusic@ECU, Society of New Music and Austin Peay State University. Lembit was appointed a Visiting Assistant Professor at Denison University for the fall of 2009 and in the fall of 2011 was appointed the first Composer In Residence of the Opera Company of Philadelphia in collaboration with Gotham Chamber Opera and Music-Theatre Group of New York.

www.lembitbeecher.com/andthen

And Then I Remember: Lembit Beecher, (2009)

Three Immigrant Songs: Beecher, (2011)

Kust tunnen kodu: Veljo Tormis (b. 1930)

Mary Bonhag, soprano | Evan Premo, double bass | Laura Mercado-Wright, mezzo-soprano

Danya Katok, soprano | Ben Grow, conductor

8pm Friday, January 20 and Saturday January 21, 2012

THE DIMENNA CENTER FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC

450 W. 37th St. New York, New York 10018

This is a general admission event. Tickets \$15 at the door.

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FOR PRESS and INTERVIEW INQUIRIES:

Emily Motherwell, OtherARTS

646.266.6918 • motherwell@otherarts.net

557 W148th Street, New York, NY 10031 www.otherarts.net