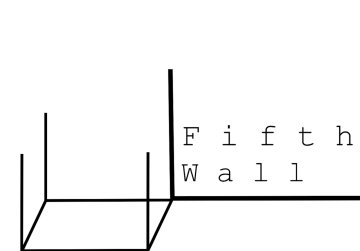


contemporaneous

and



P e r f o r m i n g A r t s

present:

The Precipice

a chamber-rock opera

Created by KARL

from Text and Music by

Karl Ronneburg and Grey Rose Grant

Production by Corey Smith

Commissioned by Contemporaneous



June 27-28, 2024

The Space at Irondale

Brooklyn, NY

Content Warning

some strong language,
conversations of sexual assault

DURATION

Approximately 100 minutes, not including intermission

TIME and PLACE:

The Past, The Present, The Future - Brooklyn, Southeast Michigan, and
Everywhere

Act I

Drones for the Late-Summer

- 1.1 we did this to ourselves
- 1.2 i just want to know how to make myself out of love
- 1.3 love is so small, but it's still bigger than us

Act II

Drones for the Pre-Fall

- 2.1 Myth and Fable no.1: and when sky breaks through sky, what's left
- 2.2 this is how the world catches fire

Drones for the Late-Winter

- intermission -

Act III

- 3.1 Good Morning, My Dear Sweet Beginning
 - 3.2 popcorn dust and former lust
 - 3.3 when threads of memory fray at the seams too much
 - 3.4 Come back around
- Drones for the Pre-Spring

Act IV

- 4.1 this constant endless driving monotonous understanding of infinity
 - 4.2 Myth and Fable no.2: learn of their multitudes
 - 4.3 the origin of sound
- Conclusion: Beings of Light and Air

*Text performed by Grey/Grey's Double and Karl/Karl's Double is generally
sourced from text written by the corresponding artist, edited and adapted by
KARL.*

*The four Drones are arrangements of Grey Rose Grant's Drones for the In
Between Times with additional vocal lines and orchestrations added by KARL,
1.3 contains material from Grant's Grey and the Morning Rain, 2.1 contains
material from Grant's Glitter Orgy, and 4.3 contains material from Grant's
Short Songs to Sing Aloud, edited and adapted by KARL.*

for our friends:

find a place to watch and look out,
a cliff by the beach, an edge in the sunlight
chase that open empty,
the feeling of turning a corner,
the boundary of now and whenever
this is two parallel lives,
this is in and out
(and in and out)
of love,
this is leaving and jumping and getting lost
and maybe moving on--
this is our precipice:

"roar, lion of the heart, and tear me open"
- Jalal al-Din Rumi

CAST

in order of appearance:

Grey's Voice Double Morgan Mastrangelo
Karl's Voice Double Wayne Arthur
Grey Grey Rose Grant
Karl Karl Ronneburg

CONTEMPORANEOUS

David Bloom, *Conductor*
Madison Greenstone, *Clarinet*
Josh Henderson, *Violin*
Titilayo Ayangade, *Cello*
Brendon Randall-Myers, *Electric Guitar*
Pat Swoboda, *Electric Bass*
Milena Gligic, *Piano/Tor Piano*
Robby Bowen, *Percussion*

*

Dylan Mattingly, *Executive and Co-Artistic Director*
David Bloom, *Co-Artistic Director*
Zachary James Ritter, *Director of Artistic Planning*
Jillian Honn, *Operations Manager*
Vicki Leona Nguyen, *Communications and Project Coordinator*

FIFTH WALL PERFORMING ARTS

Grey Rose Grant, *Artistic Director*
Karl Ronneburg, *Artistic Director*
Maya Johnson, *Executive Director*
Zoe Marie Hart, *Development Director*
Gabrielle Hemlick, *Marketing Director*

Orchestration by KARL

Additional Orchestration by Grey Rose Grant and Brian Morales
Additional Guitar Arrangements by Jeremy Esquer and Nathan Huvar

Engraving by Brian Morales

Direction, Set Design, & Costume Design by Corey Smith

Set Design by Roni Sipp

Lighting by McKenna Ebert

Sound by Charles Mueller

Stage Management by David Furney

Fifth Wall would like to thank our donors of time, funding, support, and space: Stephen Radcliffe, Weijing Xiao, Dylan Mattingly, David Bloom, Allen Bukoff, Tracy Cowart, Jessie George, Melissa Givens, Frank and Claire Ronneburg, Nicholas Felder, Andrew Zick, Brian Morales, Gabrielle Hemlick, Evan Chambers, Paul Langland, Elliot Cole, Timur Bekbosunov, Sean Connors, Fran Lockwood, Carrie Schwitters, Lawrence Schwedler, and David Widder-Varhegyi.

Contemporaneous would like to offer a special thank you to Irondale and their incredible team for creating such a sense of home for Contemporaneous and the far reaches of musical imagination. We would also like to acknowledge our dedicated community of supporters, without whom none of this would be possible, along with the support of the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul, the New York State Legislature, the Alice M. Ditson Fund at Columbia University, the Amphion Foundation, the Pacific Harmony Foundation, and New Music USA.

SYNOPSIS

by Karl Ronneburg

THE PRECIPICE is a 100-minute chamber-rock opera that explores the formation of self and our relationship with moments of transition. The libretto comes from text that my main collaborator, Grey Rose Grant, and I previously wrote as journal entries and poems some 5-10 years ago, which I've stitched together into a series of abstract conversations that make up each scene.

The music is also a collage: Grey sent me a number of their old pieces and fragments of musical material related to the themes of the text, and I also dug through 5 or 6 years of my own compositions and voice memos to find musical memories to incorporate. Then, just like the text, I stitched it all together (writing a significant amount of new music along the way) to make the final score, which features Karl and Grey as rock/folk vocalists, supported by operatic “voice doubles” (acting as narrators, consciences, and inner monologues), and a 7-person band consisting of clarinet, piano, violin, cello, electric guitar, electric bass, and percussion.

The staging, devised by director Corey Smith, is abstract as well, with a movement language developed from our residency at Avaloch Farm in August 2022.

All together, The Precipice tells the story of two parallel journeys of becoming and self-mythologizing, from both a trans/queer perspective and a cis/straight one. The “precipice” itself represents irreversible change—growing up, leaving home, and moving on from past places, relationships, and visions

of self. The show asks: is making ourselves a tragic act, a leap from the precipice, a great wrenching? How do the metaphors and myths by which we construct our identity hold us back? How do you leave behind a relationship, place, or vision of self without losing the part of it that made you who you are? And finally, do we do this alone? Is the formation of self an individual act or a collective one?

Our company, Fifth Wall Performing Arts, is founded on telling these kinds of personal stories in an experimental, contemporary format: if breaking the fourth wall is when a performer acknowledges the existence of the audience and the stage, then breaking the “fifth wall”, as we define it, occurs when a performer stops playing a character and appears as their honest self, devoid of performative action or inflection. We believe the future of live performance relies on just this: breaking that fifth wall, acknowledging the existence of the performers themselves as human beings. This opens up the traditional boundaries of performance as an artistic ritual, linking audiences with artists as people, vulnerable and in need of connection as we all are.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Okay, I know this is a ridiculous question, but what is a “self?”

Planting a flag on the summit of “who I am” seems absolutely bonkers if you look at it too long. Did I build that mountain? Did my mother? Did my friends? How about that bacteria in my gut I keep hearing so much about?

Okay, Descartes, chill out and stop thinking, just *feel* it instead — this is a question literally everyone has to deal with. That’s a feeling familiar and intricately woven in the edges of the work.

Did I say the work? I meant *The Precipice*. It is an opera assembled from the journals, sketches, and personal archives of Karl Ronneburg and Grey Grant. A collage of signposts from their lives — moments of desperation, discovery, ecstasy, terror, boredom, desire. It is deeply personal material, but it's been sculpted and shaped and reconfigured to a point of unrecognizability. The signpost whose text has faded away, without referent or context. Strangers in our own lives.

To be clear here: there is not really a plot in *The Precipice*. In place of this, something more gestural musical — a thing on the verge of story. Instead of narrative, maybe call it “the continuous-arduous-spectacular self-making self.”

Karl and Grey are the selves here with us, singing the same words they wrote years ago, in private. But now we've got a frame, a hullabaloo, a “performance” that irrevocably changes what these things mean. That, to me, is the provocation behind *The Precipice* — that autobiography and performance and collaboration are slippery motherfuckers. To think! My mother, my friends, and my bacteria all together! And now they've stumbled out onto a stage!

A humble offer for how to watch this piece: consider your own diary spilling out onto this stage. Let your own stories fill in the gaps. Free associate, ruminate, make your own home inside of the collage. Another way of saying it: this is a work about Karl and Grey, in specific, but through them — the rest of us. This is a dreamopera. The images are images, the words are words. We could be anything else.

FULL LIBRETTO:



KARL (Karl Ronneburg, he/him) is a composer, percussionist, and performance artist based in New York City, where he is the Associate Dramaturg at the Metropolitan Opera, helping to shape commissions and new works from their inceptions to their premieres. He is the co-founder and co-artistic director of Fifth Wall Performing Arts with Grey Grant and has worked with artists and companies including Radiolab, Meredith Monk, Carnegie Hall, Nico Muhly, Sō Percussion, Elliot Cole, Alkemie Early Music, Missy Mazzoli, Contemporaneous Ensemble, New Music Detroit, Anthony Davis, Christopher Rountree, Joyce DiDonato, Metropolis Ensemble, Jeanine Tesori, and the Lincoln Center Theater's Directors' Lab. KARL is a teaching artist in incarcerated communities with the non-profit Musicambia and is also the inventor of the Snaxophone, an electric Pringles can instrument. He hosts annual Fluxus-inspired parties and his work has been performed by bell towers, rock bands, orchestras, arcade machines, and people dressed in squirrel costumes, among others.

*

Grey Rose Grant (she/they) is a composer, performer, and librettist, whose music: “[Crafts] a work that is moving, evocative and, by the end, exhausting

(in the best sense)” and writes “demanding music with precision and nuance.” (*Michigan Daily*). Grey’s recent work includes *Little Histories*, a folk opera in four acts, and *Glitter Orgy*, a dance theatre work in three acts. Their opera, *Michigan Trees: A Guide to the Trees of Michigan and the Great Lakes Region* (2019) received a BMI Student Composer Award in 2021. Grey has received commissions from the Regenerate! Orchestra, Contemporaneous Ensemble, the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music, Tesla Quartet, The Detroit Women’s Chorus, and more. She is a co-founder and creative producer of [Fifth Wall Performing Arts](#), an artist-led experimental performing arts organization based in MI and NYC. North Carolina born, they currently reside in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

*

Morgan Mastrangelos' tenor has been hailed as “Fascinating and flexible” by Operawire, and “ringing and clear” by the Toledo Blade. Recent credits include Hades (cover, performed) in *Eurydice* and Don Ramiro (cover) in *La Cenerentola*, both with Boston Lyric Opera, Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus* at New England Conservatory, Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Wichita Grand Opera) and Frederic in the *Pirates of Penzance* (New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players). Concert credits include the tenor solos in Bach’s BWV 5, 78, and 93 with Emmanuel Music in Boston, where they sing as a regular chorister, *Messiah* (Hudson Valley Philharmonic), *Carmina Burana* (Carnegie Hall), and 2nd place in the Lyndon Woodside Oratorio Competition. An avid interpreter of cross-genre projects and contemporary music, Morgan originated the role of Michael in Bryce McClendon’s musical play “The Smallest Sound in the Smallest Space” which premiered last spring at the cell theatre in Manhattan, and was recently re-mounted at the Clark Studio Theatre at Lincoln Center. Next they join Teatro Nuovo as a Studio Artist, covering the principal role of Edemondo in the modern premiere of Carolina Uccelli’s *Anna di Resburgo*. They are the recipient of the Deans’ Scholarship at New England Conservatory, and are pursuing a Master of Music with Bradley Williams.

*

Baritone **Wayne Arthur** (He/They) is an artist with a heart-felt intelligence, dedicated to telling liberatory new stories and uncovering untold historical truths through voice, acting and movement. Wayne recently won the Third Place and Spirituals Prizes at the 2024 George Shirley Vocal Competition. Wayne is a performer and collaborator in Jonathan González’ *Spectral Dances*, which will be presented at the Academy of Arts and Letters in NYC in October 2024.

Over the last few seasons Wayne appeared as Baritone 1 in Anthony Davis’ *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* at the Seattle Opera, Metropolitan Opera, Detroit Opera and Boston Modern Orchestra Project. Wayne appeared in the Metropolitan Opera premiere of *Fire Shut up in my Bones*, which received the 2023 Grammy Award for Best Opera Record.

During the 2022-2023 season, Wayne was a member of the prestigious Opera Institute at Boston University where he demonstrated versatility in performances as Dr. Rappaccini in Daniel Catan’s *La Hija de Rappaccini*, John Brooke in Mark Adamo’s *Little Women* and Melisso in Handel’s *Alcina* at Boston University. In October of 2022 Wayne had the honor of being invited to cover the soloist, bass-baritone Davóne Tines, in MacArthur Grant recipient Tyshawn Sorey’s *Monochromatic Light: Afterlife* at the Park Avenue Armory, under the direction of the legendary Peter Sellars.

For more updates, visit www.waynearthur.me or follow Wayne on Instagram: @waynethur.

*

Corey Smith is an artist and director from Chicago, Illinois. Their work has been seen at the Steppenwolf Theater, the Hyde Park Art Center, the Mattress Factory, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Emil Bach House, the Rotterdam Film Festival, the Chicago International Puppet Festival, and the Bath Fringe Festival. Their work has been featured by Hyperallergic, Architectural Digest, and the Chicago Reader. Corey is an avid collaborator and has worked with artists such as Théâtre de l’Entrouvert, Every House Has a Door, Doreen

Chan, and Rough House Puppet Theater Company. They teach at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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Contemporaneous is an ensemble of 25 musicians whose mission is to bring to life the most transformative music by living composers through performances, commissions, recordings, and educational programs. Described as "exact and detailed, but also lively and openly dancing" (*The New York Times*) and "leading new music towards its better self" (*I Care If You Listen*), Contemporaneous particularly champions the creation of large-scale works and "dream projects," which composers might not otherwise have opportunities to realize due to scale.

Based in New York City and active throughout the United States, Contemporaneous has premiered over 200 new works, and has been presented by such institutions as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Park Avenue Armory, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Walt Disney Concert Hall, PROTOTYPE Festival, Merkin Concert Hall, MATA Festival, St. Ann's Warehouse, and Bang on a Can and has worked with such artists as David Byrne, Donnacha Dennehy, Iarla Ó Lionáird, Dawn Upshaw, and Julia Wolfe. Contemporaneous' programming has also received acclaim from community members, artists, and press of all kinds, with the ensemble's recent performance of ***Stranger Love*** being listed as one of 2023's "*best classical music performances*" by *the New York Times*.

Contemporaneous also leads participatory programs for public school students in the communities where the ensemble performs. These workshops are designed to instill a passion for new music and to convey the power of careful listening and meaningful expression through music. The ensemble has held residencies at such institutions as Colgate University, Hamilton College, City University of New York, the University of New Orleans, Williams College, and Bard College, where the group was founded in 2010. Contemporaneous is a federally tax-exempt not-for-profit organization, supported by a dedicated community of listeners.

*

Fifth Wall Performing Arts is an artist-led experimental performing arts organization who values the whole artist—artists as creators who do not fit into one discipline, as individuals with unique life experiences, as people who want to be heard. Fifth Wall Performing Arts began its life in an Ann Arbor living room, where founders Karl and Grey produced an adaptation of Philip Glass' "Einstein on the Beach", entitled "Einstein in the HOUSE". The wildly successful event, the video of which was tweeted by Philip Glass (twice) and called "bonkers insane brilliant" by Nico Muhly, was the catalyst for Fifth Wall to continue their work producing new works of experimental theatre and music. Since then, Fifth Wall has premiered Grey Grant's folk-operas, "Michigan Trees" and "Little Histories" in Michigan and New York City, presented four festivals of historic Fluxus works and new Fluxus-inspired compositions, inaugurated team member Maya Johnson's storytelling audio series, "Black Hearts, Black Voices", and premiered Karl's chamber-rock opera THE PRECIPICE.