

Scott Ordway

Music and multimedia works
2016–2022

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Biography

Composer and multimedia artist SCOTT ORDWAY (b. 1984, California) has become recognized for his boundary-defying, mixed-media projects, creating widely-acclaimed work that has been called “exquisite” (*New York Times*) and “arresting” (*Gramophone*), “hypnotic” (*BBC Music*) and “a marvel” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*). Ontario’s *Textura* recently described him as “one of today’s most gifted and thoughtful composers.” Heard on major stages around the world, Ordway’s remarkably diverse works fuse his music with text (frequently his own), video, digital soundscape, photography, and experimental theater to explore an eclectic array of contemporary, often urgent themes about ecology, architecture, protest and revolution, and urban life. He is Assistant Professor of Music Composition at Rutgers University.

Major Commissions 2016–2022

- 2022 Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, Roomful of Teeth. *The End of Rain*. Orchestra, eight voices, video [50’]
- 2020 The Thirteen. *The Outer Edge of Youth*. Choral opera in two acts [82’]
- 2020 Swarthmore, Haverford, Bryn Mawr, and Hamilton Colleges. *Twenty/Twenty* for choir and digital video [7’]
- 2019 SOLI Chamber Ensemble. *The Clearing and the Forest*. Staged work for chamber ens. [74’]
- 2018 Tucson Symphony. *In the Kingdom of Bells*. Orchestra [13’]
- 2018 Arlen Hlusko, cellist. *Nineteen Movements for Unaccompanied Cello* [50’]
- 2018 Julia Dawson, mezzo-soprano. *Girl in the Snow* for voice and piano [37’]
- 2016 Newburyport Chamber Music Festival. *Mare Vitalis*. Three-part cycle for various chamber ensembles [45’]
- 2016 Penn Museum of Archeology and Anthropology. *Tonight We Tell the Secrets of the World*. String ensemble and lighting design [25’]
- 2014 Lorelei Ensemble. *North Woods*. SSAA vocal ensemble [13’]

Recordings

- 2023 *North Woods*. Lorelei Ensemble (New Focus Recordings, forthcoming)
- 2023 *Breathmark*. Suejin Jung, piano (TRPTK Recordings, Netherlands, forthcoming)
- 2023 *Nineteen Movements for Unaccompanied Cello—excerpts*. Arlen Hlusko, cello (Bright Shiny Things, forthcoming)
- 2022 *The Outer Edge of Youth*. The Thirteen (Acis Productions)
- 2022 *The Clearing and the Forest*. SOLI Chamber Ensemble (Acis Productions)
- 2022 *Quiet Music for the City of Hong Kong*. (Acis Productions)
- 2021 *Nineteen Movements for Unaccompanied Cello*. Arlen Hlusko (Acis Productions)
- 2020 *Girl in the Snow*. Julia Dawson, Anna Naretto (Acis Productions)
- 2015 *Let There Be Not Darkness But Light*. Hong Kong Philharmonic Chamber Players (Naxos)

Selected Awards and Fellowships 2011–2022

- 2022 Recording Project Grant, Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University; New York, NY
- 2022 Project Grant. Sempervirens Fund; Los Altos, CA
- 2021 “Grants for Arts Projects” Award. National Endowment for the Arts (awarded to the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music for the commission of *The End of Rain*); Washington, DC
- 2021 Margaret and Lee Echols Distinguished Fellowship. The Hambidge Center for Creative Arts & Sciences; Rabun Gap, GA
- 2019 Project Grant. Pennsylvania Council on the Arts; Harrisburg, PA
- 2019 Tuttle Creative Residency Award. Hurford Center for Arts and Humanities, Haverford College; Haverford, PA
- 2017 Composers & the Voice Fellowship. American Opera Projects; New York, NY
- 2017 International Call for Scores Winner. Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra; Los Angeles, CA
- 2016 Composer Fellowship. Intimacy of Creativity Five-Year Retrospective Festival; Hong Kong
- 2015 Composer Fellowship and Audience Prize. Intimacy of Creativity Festival; Hong Kong
- 2015 “EarShot” National Call for Scores Winner. American Composers Orchestra; New York, NY
- 2014 Project Grant. New Music USA; New York, NY
- 2014 National Call for Scores Winner. Boston Musica Viva; Boston, MA
- 2013 Community Partners Grant. American Composers Forum; Minneapolis, MN
- 2012 Susan and Ford Schumann Scholarship. Aspen Music Festival and School; Aspen, CO
- 2012 Subito Grant. American Composers Forum; Minneapolis, MN
- 2012 David Halstead Prize for Best Original Composition. University of Pennsylvania; Philadelphia, PA
- 2011 Hilda K. Nietzsche Prize in Music. University of Pennsylvania; Philadelphia, PA

Selected Collaborations

Festivals & Institutions: American Opera Projects (Brooklyn, NY), Bang on a Can Summer Festival (North Adams, MA), Beijing Modern Music Festival (Beijing), Black Hills Chamber Music Society (Rapid City, SD), Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music (Santa Cruz, CA), Carolina Chamber Music Festival (New Bern, NC), Chamber Cartel (Atlanta, GA), Chamber Music Columbus (Columbus, OH), Five Boroughs Music Festival (NYC), Freie Universität Berlin (Berlin, Germany), Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler (Berlin, Germany), Hong Kong Arts Festival (Hong Kong), Newburyport Chamber Music Festival (Newburyport, MA), New York Opera Fest (NYC), Now Hear This Festival, Peabody Institute (Baltimore, MD), Musica+ (Frankfurt, Germany), Penn Museum of Archeology & Anthropology (Phila., PA), Portland Chamber Music Festival (Portland, ME), Trinity Wall Street (NYC). **Large Ensembles:** Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, Colorado Springs Philharmonic, Curtis Symphony Orchestra, Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra, Oregon Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, Tucson Symphony Orchestra. **Instrumental Ensembles:** Arneis String Quartet (Boston, MA), Aspen Contemporary Ensemble (Aspen, CO), Bold City Contemporary Ensemble (Jacksonville, FL), Boston Musica Viva (Boston, MA), counterinduction (NYC), Daedalus String Quartet (Philadelphia, PA), Eugene Contemporary Chamber Ensemble (Eugene, Oregon), Fireworks Ensemble (NYC), Tanglewood New Fromm Players (Lenox, MA), Hong Kong Philharmonic (principals), Jasper String Quartet (Philadelphia, PA), Juventas New Music Ensemble (Boston, MA), Momenta String Quartet (NYC), Norbotten NEO (Norbotten, Sweden), So Percussion (NYC), SOLI Chamber Ensemble (San Antonio, TX), Syzygy Chamber Ensemble (NYC). **Vocal Ensembles:** The Choral Scholars of the Philadelphia Cathedral (Phila., PA), Kirkpatrick Choir (New Brunswick, NJ), Lorelei Ensemble (Boston, MA), Metropolitan Chorale (Boston, MA), New Hampshire All State Treble Choir (Concord, NH), Oratorio Chorale (Portland, ME), Pacific Collegiate Chorale (Santa Cruz, CA), Roomful of Teeth, The Thirteen (Washington, D.C.), Williams College Choir (Williamstown, MA), Yale Institute of Sacred Music (New Haven, CT). **Instrumental Soloists:** Teddy Abrams, clarinetist (Louisville), Becky Anderson, violinist (Vera Quartet), Richard Bamping, cellist (principal, Hong Kong Philharmonic), Steven Beck, pianist (New York), Michelle Cann, pianist (Philadelphia), Amalia Hall, violinist (Orchestra Wellington, NZ), Kristjan Hallik, violinist (Estonia), Arlen Hlusko, cellist (Bang On a Can All Stars), Sébastien Hurtaud, cellist (Paris), Lio Kuokman, pianist (Taiwan), Jessica Meyer, violist (New York), Anna Naretto, pianist (Faculty, Kronberg Academy), David Russell, cellist (principal, Opera Boston), Julian Schwarz, cellist (New York), Camden Shaw, cellist (Dover Quartet), Jonathan Spitz, cellist (Orpheus Chamber Orchestra), Amy Yang, pianist (Faculty, Curtis Institute of Music), Yingna Zhao, violinist (principal, Hong Kong Philharmonic). **Vocal Soloists:** Solmaaz Adeli, mezzo-soprano, Cynthia Cook, mezzo-soprano, Julia Dawson, mezzo-soprano, Mario Diaz-Moresco, baritone, Melissa Fogarty, soprano, Blake Friedman, tenor, Ah Young Hong, soprano, Emily Marvosh, contralto, Laurie Monahan, soprano, Margot Rood, soprano, Adrian Rosas, bass, Maria Valdes, soprano.

Press Coverage

New York Times, *Boston Globe*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Washington Classical Review*, *San Antonio Express-News*, *Sacramento Bee*, *Classical Voice North America*, *BBC Music Magazine*, *CBC*, *Interlude Hong Kong*, *Gramophone*, *Symphony Magazine*, *OperaWire*, *Texas Public Radio*, and *NewMusicBox*, among others.

Juried Artist Residencies

2023 Visby International Centre for Composers; Visby, Sweden
2021 Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Sciences; Rabun Gap, GA (Margaret & Lee Echols Distinguished Fellowship)
2018 Visby International Centre for Composers; Visby, Sweden
2017 Willapa Bay AiR; Oysterville, WA
2016 Brush Creek Foundation for the Arts; Saratoga, WY

Teaching and Research Appointments

2017— Assistant Professor of Music Composition, Rutgers University
2014–2017 Faculty in Music Theory, Curtis Institute of Music
2013–2014 Visiting Assistant Professor of Music, Bates College

Education

2013 Ph.D in Music Composition, University of Pennsylvania
2008 M.M. in Music Composition, University of Oregon
2006 B.A. in Music and English Literature, University of Puget Sound

2014 Studies in Composition, June in Buffalo (Buffalo, NY)
2012 Studies in Composition, Aspen Summer Music Festival (Aspen, CO)
2010 Studies in Composition, Freie Universität Berlin (Berlin, Germany)
2007 Studies in Composition, Accademia Chigiana (Siena, Italy)
2007 Studies in Composition, Oregon Bach Festival Composers Symposium (Eugene, OR)

**Selected Projects
2016–2022**

The End of Rain

The End of Rain (2022) is a 50-minute work for large orchestra, live-triggered video, and eight vocal soloists that was commissioned by the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music and Grammy-winning vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth. In it, I borrow techniques from journalism and the qualitative social sciences to create a multimedia work which dramatizes the emotional and spiritual impact of wildfire and drought on individuals and communities in California. From 2020–2022, I gathered 80,000 words of firsthand testimony from 225 Californians who describe their personal experience of fire and drought. From this large dataset, I extracted the libretto for the piece. I also shot and edited documentary video footage of the phenomena described in the texts. This video is projected as part of the musical performance.

“Haunting and beautiful.” —*San Francisco Chronicle*

“Scott Ordway is a 21st-century auteur. His eclectic creations involve music, video, performative installations, poetry and photography. All of this handmade rigor dissolves boundaries while lifting symphonic music into a realm that has no name.”
—*Good Times Santa Cruz*

“Haunting...heartbreaking...a majestic three-part symphony.”
—*Lookout Santa Cruz*

dimensions (orchestral work)

Orchestra, eight vocal soloists
Live-triggered digital video
3.3.3.3, 4.3.3.1, timp+3, hp, cel, strings
50”

dimensions (book)

Hardcover, foil-stamped linen
8.20 x 12.00 inches
195 pages, 97 photographs
Signed and numbered first edition of 150
Published with support from Sempervirens Fund

premiere

Commissioned by the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music
July 29, 2022
Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium
Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, Roomful of Teeth,
Cristian Macelaru (cond.)

media

Score

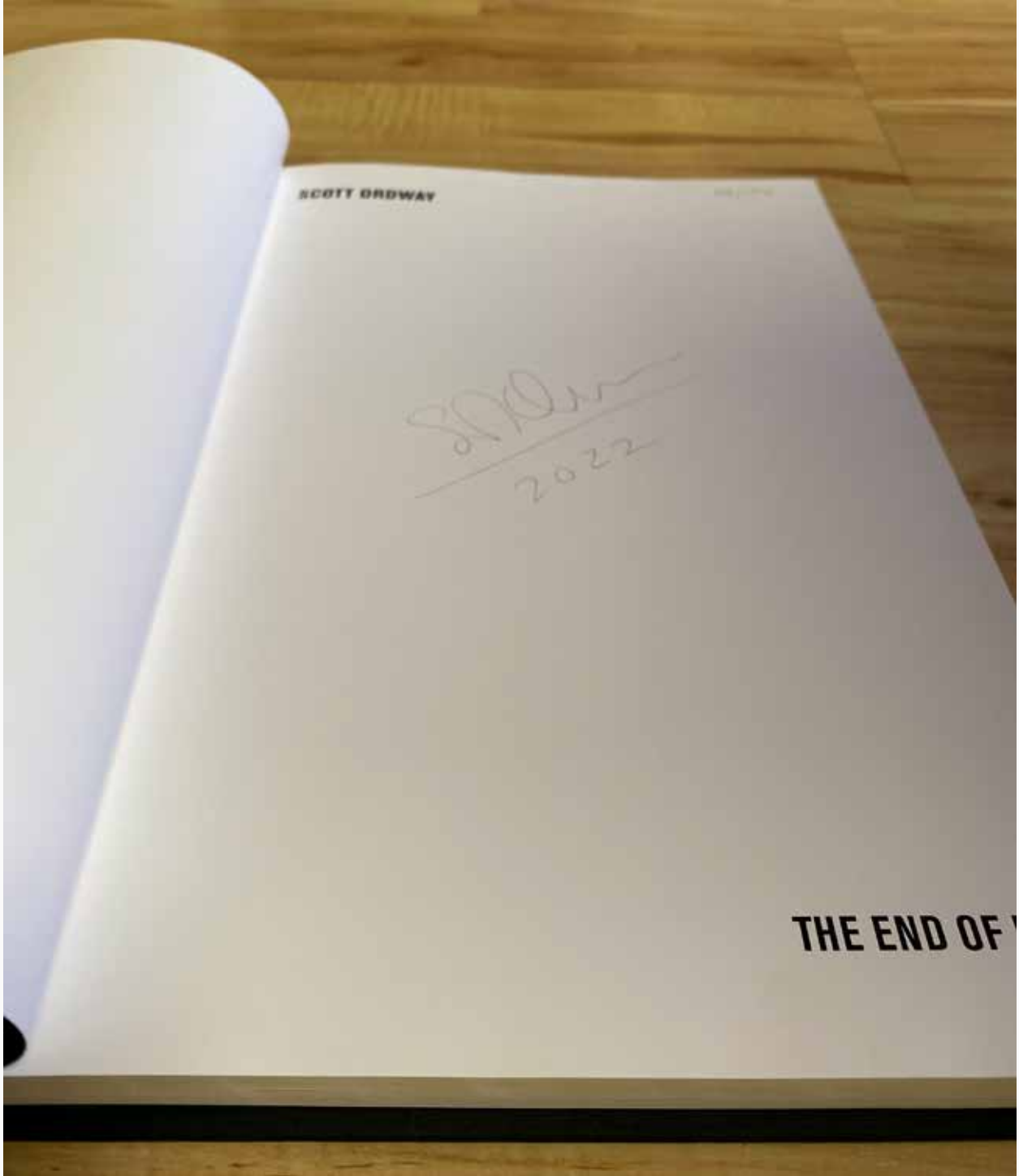
[Private, archival audio and video link](#)
(password = “california”)

The End of Rain, 2022
video still

The End of Rain, 2022
video still







The End of Rain, 2022
still image

The End of Rain, 2022
still image

The End of Rain, 2022
book view

The Outer Edge of Youth

The Outer Edge of Youth (2020) is a choral opera in two acts based on an original libretto by Scott Ordway. The piece relates an encounter between two young boys and a redwood forest in which they discover they can speak with the birds. The work is concerned with the relationships between boys and young men, our changing landscape, our kinship with animals, and with the importance of childhood.

Designed for either staged or concert performance, the work features two lead roles for soprano and mezzo-soprano, a prominent choral part, and a string ensemble consisting of three cellos and one bass.

“A contemplative and thought-provoking new choral opera.”—*Opera Wire*

“A hypnotic, haunting fable... *The Outer Edge of Youth* has both the solemnity and wonder of an oratorio and the heightened emotion wrung from the enhanced reality in which opera specializes... the music shimmers, soars, and settles... creating an ecstatic catharsis.”—*Washington Classical Review*

dimensions

soprano solo, alto solo, SATB choir, three cellos, double bass
video projections
90”

premiere

11 May, 2022
First Unitarian UCC, Washington DC
Amy Broadbent, soprano; Emily Marvosh, alto; The Thirteen
Music direction by Matthew Robertson
Video projections by Scott Ordway
Commissioned by The Thirteen

media

Score

[CD and Streaming \(Acis Productions\)](#)

The Outer Edge of Youth, 2022
video still

The Outer Edge of Youth, 2022
video still



Watershed

Watershed is an outdoor sound installation for choir and moving audience. It was designed to reclaim an unused underground tunnel that is the only pedestrian route from the main campus of Rutgers University to Rutgers Gardens.

Every day, we are surrounded by lives very unlike our own: lives that grow in the soil and fly through the air, lives that swim in the water and crawl over the land, some that thrive in darkness and others that crave the light, lives that are playful and those that are timid and many that are neither playful nor timid but simply exist, lives that know something like love, or at least companionship, and many more lives that are brutally indifferent to these things, lives that we can see and lives that we cannot, lives that we bring into our own bodies as we breathe the air and drink the water, lives that are so small we scarcely comprehend them, lives at a scale we can relate to, and, sometimes, lives that are so immense that they frighten us or threaten to crush us or make us feel very weak and insignificant and alone. We are surrounded, too, by the memories of lives that no longer exist, of lives which have gone extinct. Every day, we are immersed in life.

The diversity and complexity of all this life, though, can exceed our capacity for understanding. When we are presented with too much information, or asked to attend to several things all at once, we begin to lose track of it all. This is the case with the overwhelming number of other lives with which we share our environment. Their quantity overwhelms us. We become indifferent.

Sometimes, an act of translation can reestablish our sensitivity to things we have learned to ignore. With *Watershed*, I have translated some of the plants and animals of the Raritan River region into sound. To do this, I have assigned a specific sequence of musical pitches and rhythms to the name of each species and distributed them among 80 singers, each of whom represents a different living thing.

The work was designed for an outdoor performance by the Rutgers University Vorhees Choir, directed by Brandon Williams, as part of the “March to Rutgers Gardens” event in September 2021.

dimensions

Outdoor sound installation for moving audience, SSAA choir
Indeterminate length

premiere

26 September, 2021 as part of the March to Rutgers Gardens
Vorhees Choir; Brandon Williams (cond.)
Staged and directed by Scott Ordway
Commissioned by the Rutgers University Vorhees Choir

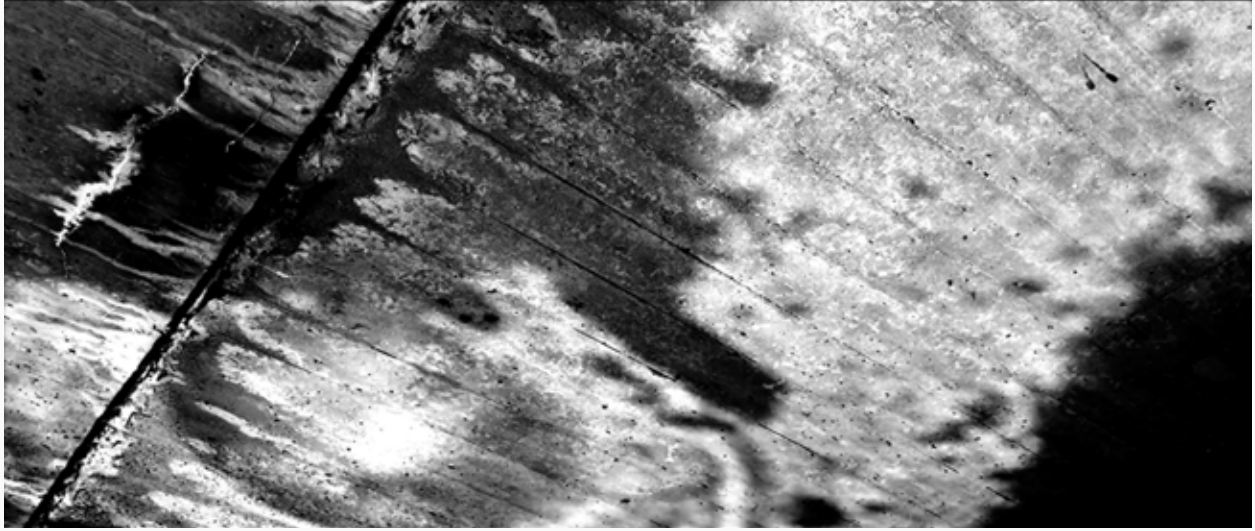
media

[Video Link](#)

Watershed, 2021
installation view

Watershed, 2021
installation view

Watershed, 2021
installation view



Twenty / Twenty

In September 2020, I asked 100 singers from three collegiate choirs to complete the sentence “One year ago today, I did not know...” I compiled and edited their responses in order to create the text for *Twenty / Twenty*. Each line of the text is either based on a single response or is a synthesis of two or more related responses. At the same time, I asked each singer to capture their experience of the early pandemic on video, from their perspective.

I worked with 100 text submissions, 1,000 video submissions, and 600 audio clips to create the text, musical composition, socially-distanced choral performance, and digital video.

“A quiet work that says it all.” —*Philadelphia Inquirer*
(December 2020)

“Elegiac...great emotional impact...the ultimate symbolic return.”
—*Philadelphia Inquirer* (November 2021)

“Seamless...quietly melodic...masterful.”
—*Phindie: Philadelphia Theater and Arts*

dimensions

Crowdsourced text and digital video
SATB choir
7”

digital premiere

10 December 2020
Haverford, Swarthmore, Bryn Mawr, and
Hamilton College Choirs
Music direction by Nathan Zullinger
Digital video by Scott Ordway

Commissioned by Haverford, Swarthmore, Bryn Mawr, and
Hamilton Colleges

live premiere

November 2021
Choral Arts Philadelphia; Matthew Glandorf, cond.
Church of the Holy Trinity Rittenhouse Square (Philadelphia, PA)

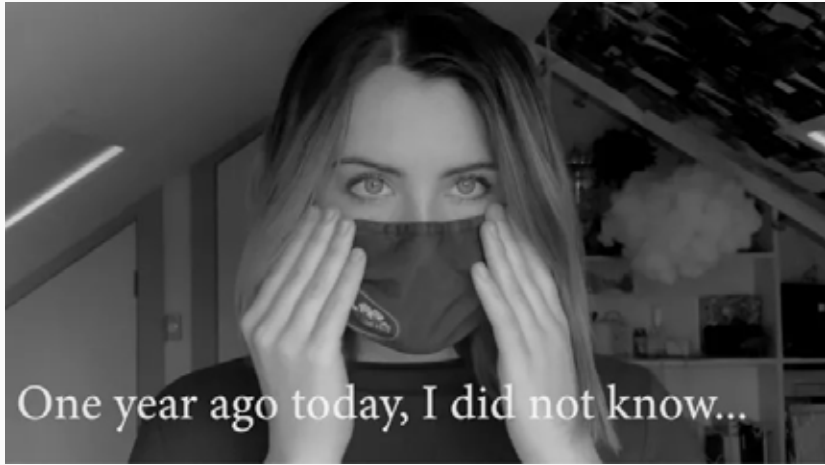
media

[Video Link](#)

Twenty/Twenty, 2020
video still

Twenty/Twenty, 2020
video still

Twenty/Twenty, 2020
video still



The Clearing and the Forest

The Clearing and the Forest (2019) is a staged, experimental theater work for chamber ensemble. The piece uses music, movement, and plant-based sculptural installations to explore the relationship between landscape, migration, and refuge. Members of the chamber ensemble perform as silent actors, interacting with plant-based sculptural installations and other scenic elements designed by Erica Eliot.

“Ordway’s thought-provoking musical essay on migration and the search for safety is certainly timely...soul-stirring music and performances.” —*BBC Music*

“*The Clearing and the Forest* solidifies Ordway’s reputation as one of today’s most gifted and thoughtful composers. He’s that rare thing: an artist who’s fully absorbed and steeped within the classical tradition yet cultivated a personal vision that’s beholden to no one but himself. He is a serious composer in the best sense of the word: every work is meticulously conceived, impeccably crafted, and built to last.” —*Textura*

“An immersive landscape.” —*San Antonio Current*

“Complete and meaningful...its premiere by the SOLI Chamber Ensemble solidifies the quartet’s reputation as a national and global leader in modern music.”
—*San Antonio Express-News*

“Ordway has created in *The Clearing and the Forest* a musical score of admirable discipline and integrity, and with great heart.” —*Classical Voice North America*

dimensions

clarinet, violin, cello, piano
lighting design and plant-based installations
90”

premiere

Commissioned by SOLI Chamber Ensemble
2 June, 2019
McNay Art Museum; San Antonio, TX
SOLI Chamber Ensemble
Stage direction by Scott Ordway
Scenic design by Erica Eliot

media

Score

[CD and Streaming \(Acis Productions, 2022\)](#)

The Clearing and the Forest, 2022
performance still

The Outer Edge of Youth, 2022
production design still







Nineteen Movements for Unaccompanied Cello

Nineteen Movements for Unaccompanied Cello (2018) is an extended collection of short movements that explore the vast expressive capabilities of the cello while at the same time forming a powerful and cohesive narrative arc. It was commissioned by and developed in close collaboration with Arlen Hlusko (cellist, Bang on a Can All Stars).

The work is organized as a palindrome wherein many of the movements correspond to a “false twin” later in the work in which fundamental musical ideas are reimagined and recast. In some instances, the transformation is significant; in others, material is repeated verbatim to create unmistakable narrative connections. The longest and most dramatic movement is at the center of the work and has no twin.

dimensions

solo cello
50”

premiere

2 February, 2018
Chestnut Hill Skyspace; Philadelphia, PA
Arlen Hlusko, cello
Commissioned by Arlen Hlusko

media

Score

CD and Streaming (Acis Productions, 2022)

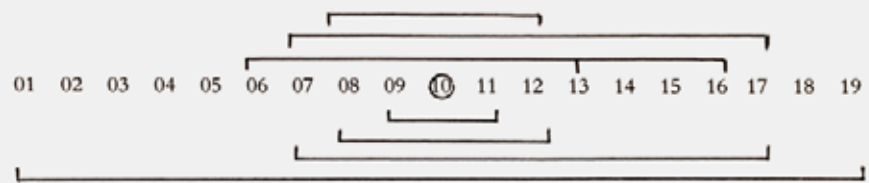
“An architectural triumph.” —*Broad Street Review*

“Absorbing originality.” —*Gramophone*

“There’s a terrific focus in the performance and an air of considered quietude in the music, which has a rather hypnotic effect. Let it lull you.” —*BBC Music Magazine*

“The close collaboration between two outstanding young artists...captured my imagination...a fascinating program-length collection that explore the vast expressive capabilities of the cello, while at the same time forming a powerful and cohesive narrative arc.” —*Interlude HK*

“This music is not to be ignored.” —*American Record Guide*



Tonight We Tell the Secrets of the World

Tonight We Tell the Secrets of the World (2016) is a “whisper play” in which the audience performs as a large choir of whispered voices signaled by a custom lighting array. The work is based on ancient texts from the collections of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology.

“A marvel.” —*Philadelphia Inquirer*

“The work resonated with humanist spirituality, haunting the imagination long after the last echo died away.” —*The Broad Street Review*

dimensions

Soprano voice, alto sax, string ensemble
Lighting design, choir of whispered voices
25”

premiere

26 April 2016
Penn Museum; Philadelphia, PA
Musicians from the Curtis Institute of Music
Music direction and lighting design by Scott Ordway
Experience design by Erica Eliot and Kate Clayton

Commissioned by the Penn Museum of
Archeology and Anthropology with support
from the American Composers Forum

media

[Score](#)

[Audio and video link](#)

Tonight We Tell the Secrets of the World, 2016
Penn Museum, musicians from the Curtis Institute of Music
performance still

Tonight We Tell the Secrets of the World, 2016
Penn Museum, musicians from the Curtis Institute of Music
performance still





Tonight We Tell the Secrets of the World, 2017
Huntingdon Library (Pasadena, CA), Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra
installation view



Tonight We Tell the Secrets of the World, 2017
Penn Museum, Daedalus String Quartet
performance view

Contact

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