

*Composer Portraits*

# Jonathan Harvey

Ensemble Signal

Brad Lubman, *conductor*

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Thursday, October 11, 8:00 p.m.  
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*Death of Light/Light of Death* (1998)

Jonathan Harvey (b. 1939)

- I. Jesus Crucified
- II. Mary Magdalene
- III. Mary, Mother of Jesus
- IV. John the Apostle
- V. John the Baptist

Jackie LeClair, *oboe*; Nuiko Wadden, *harp*; Courtney Orlando, *violin*;  
John Pickford Richards, *viola*; Lauren Radnofsky, *cello*

## INTERMISSION

*Bhakti* (1982)

Harvey

Paul Coleman, *sound director*; Kelli Kathman, *flute*;  
Jackie LeClair, *oboe*; Adrián Sandi, *clarinet*; Ken Thomson, *bass clarinet*;  
David Byrd-Marrow, *horn*; Mike Gurfield, *trumpet*; James Hirschfeld, *trombone*;  
Bill Solomon, *percussion*; Doug Perkins, *percussion*; Oliver Hagen, *piano*;  
Nuiko Wadden, *harp*; Courtney Orlando, *violin*; Olivia DePrato, *violin*;  
Ari Streisfeld, *violin*; John Pickford Richards, *viola*; Lauren Radnofsky, *cello*



This program runs approximately 80 minutes including a brief intermission.

Major support for Composer Portraits is provided by  
the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts.

*Please note that photography and the use of recording devices are not permitted. Remember to turn off all cellular phones and pagers before tonight's performance begins.*

*Miller Theatre is wheelchair accessible. Large print programs are available upon request. For more information or to arrange accommodations, please call 212-854-7799.*

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# About the Program

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## Introduction

*“I have the feeling there’s some new type of music hovering on the horizon, which I can glimpse very fleetingly now and then, and which does seem like a change of consciousness.”*

Jonathan Harvey says a lot about his music in this innocent sentence — not least in the innocence of it. There is the idea of music as having a physical presence, yet one not subject to gravity, and the related idea of it being seen, glimpsed. Music is light, in two senses: it hovers, and it is visible. And then there is the newness of it. It is coming from somewhere else, over the horizon, and bringing with it, or being brought by, a revolution in thinking. While existing outside us — floating in the air, perhaps like clouds in changing sunlight, or like stars and aurorae illuminating the night sky — it is with us, or, rather, it excites us to be with it, to rise up into its wafting luminescence.

To some extent, this “new type of music” is very old, a renewal of what existed in Europe before the Renaissance: a music neither grounded nor driven by the harmonic forces of the major-minor system, a music whose unfolding, while certainly calculated and certainly persuasive, is not rational. One of Harvey’s ideals is plainsong, with its ability indeed to hover, to float, and to evoke a space and a time beyond where we are now. But his music is also aware of other cultures, especially those of India, cultures that seem specially sympathetic to an artist for whom sensuality and spirituality exist in an embrace.

There is an embrace here, too, between stillness and movement, and between the deeply ancient and the contemporary. Archetypes of song and dance exist in this music along with instrumental practices introduced only recently. Electronic music, a sphere to which Harvey has returned repeatedly, provides a sound world that is at once totally new and, as it seems, the continuing echo of a larger universe that was hidden from us for so long. This is also music that draws from widely different and seemingly incompatible streams: the English cathedral tradition, in which Harvey began his musical life as a choirboy, and Parisian spectralism; a principle of generative melody inherited from

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Karlheinz Stockhausen (on whom Harvey wrote a book) and the imbricated serialism of Milton Babbitt (with whom he studied at Princeton when he was thirty and already well established as a composer).

Harvey's large output is decently represented on CD, with several compilations of orchestral, ensemble, and chamber pieces, as well as recordings of two of his three operas. There is also plentiful material available online, especially at his own website ([www.vivosvoco.com](http://www.vivosvoco.com)) and that of his publisher, Faber Music.

### ***Death of Light / Light of Death (1998)***

- I. Jesus Crucified
- II. Mary Magdalene
- III. Mary, Mother of Jesus
- IV. John the Apostle
- V. John the Baptist

The Isenheim Altarpiece, on which Mathias Grünewald was working five hundred years ago, painting it for a monastery-hospital in Alsace, is one of the great depictions of the Christian story. As originally planned, the altarpiece had wings that could be opened out to reveal images of glory, but when closed it showed a Crucifixion scene against an almost black sky. In 1852, the piece was moved to another former monastic building that had become a museum, in nearby Colmar, and there, each Good Friday, it is honored with a concert. Harvey was commissioned to write a work for the 1998 occasion, given by members of the Ensemble InterContemporain, and this piece for oboe doubling English horn, harp doubling tam tam, and string trio was the result.

At his desk, as he worked, was a reproduction of the painting. "Through the crescendoing intensity of looking at the figures and listening internally to the music which reflected that looking," he recalls in his book *Music and Inspiration*, "and looking again with increasingly emotive musical associations, then listening again, to and fro, I became more deeply involved in an artist's work than I have ever been before. I was completely overwhelmed by its power."

There are five movements for the five figures in the Crucifixion panel, and Harvey's descriptions of these figures suggest his musical concern with the corporeal. Jesus in the center is "the body on the cross bearing gruesome scars of terrible physical torture." On his right is a group of three: Mary Magdalene, "kneeling, leaning back to look

wildly, passionately up at Jesus, hands imploring”; Mary, the Mother of Jesus, “pale, in a deathly faint, wiped out”; and John the Apostle, “holding the senseless body of Mary, weeping hopelessly.” On Jesus’s left stands just one figure, John the Baptist, “by contrast completely impassive, grave, seeing another world, yet, from the other side of the picture, pointing at its subject, Jesus.”

John the Baptist comes from the past and from the future, for he died long before and yet is alive for ever, profiting from the sacrifice to which he gestures. “Perhaps no crucifixion ever seemed quite so devastating,” Harvey comments of this picture, “the Light has gone out.” Yet, as John the Baptist knows, the extinction of the Light at this moment allows the illumination of a new Light on the plane of eternity. Blackness begins to shine.

Harvey approaches the corporeal, in the first four movements, along two dimensions: that of gestures suggestive of pain, swooning, and tears, and that of performing techniques that press the body of the instrument to its extremes, especially the multiphonics required from the oboist — chords of raw, untempered sounds produced by special fingerings — and the intense attacks that draw attention to the harp as a body resonating under blows.

Oboe and harp in the Jesus movement release a sequence of violent sounds that are projected in quiet echo by all five instruments, with a middle section that has the oboe moving in small intervals — semitones and quarter-tones — generally falling. Mary Magdalene has what is almost a dance of pain and failing breath, featuring the English horn and ending as if with a rising gaze. Then comes the Virgin Mary’s funeral march, for oboe and tam tam against high string harmonics, the sound periodically washed away. John the Apostle has the work’s brief scherzo, music with the elation of the desperate. Finally comes the Baptist’s glow: a high E that is pulsing and soon growing into another slow march, but a march towards the light.

“In death itself,” Harvey concludes, “the ultimate meaning can be prophetically found by those who have eyes to see — a message for all religions and all beliefs and no beliefs.”



## ***Bhakti* (1982)**

Written thirty years ago, in the early days of Pierre Boulez’s research center in Paris, *Bhakti* was a breakthrough piece both for that institution and for the composer. Harvey had long been fascinated by how instrumental music could be extended by electronics into a kind of extraterrestrial space, and the new facilities in Paris, developed and operated by outstanding technicians, gave him the opportunity to realize this possibility at once subtly and boldly. The work, for fifteen-piece ensemble and tape (nowadays replaced by a digital medium, but the term “tape” will be retained here for convenience), takes its title from a Sanskrit word with connotations of a personal devotion to the deity. The published score, bearing an Indian image of the wheel of fortune on fiery red, contains the following note by the composer:

“*Bhakti* was written in 1982, to a commission from IRCAM, Paris. It is in twelve short movements totalling about fifty minutes. There are thirty-six subsections, each one defined by a certain number of instruments playing a certain pitch cell. As there are only twelve types of subsection, each one occurs (with variation) three times, thus making for repetitions over the course of the work. The musical syntax is symmetrical around a central axis. The ear is unconsciously attracted to hear the harmony not as dissonant over a fundamental bass but as floating free from bass functions and yet rigorously controlled. The tape is composed largely of sounds drawn from the instrumental ensemble transformed and mixed by computer. It has many functions: of dialogue, transformation, memory, anticipation, ‘simultaneous translation’, and of reaching beyond the instrumental scale to a more universal dimension. A quotation from the Rig Veda is appended at the end of each movement. These Sanskrit hymns were written some four thousand years ago. They are keys to a transcendent consciousness.”

A much longer essay by Harvey on the piece, “The Conception and Development of a Composition,” appeared in *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought* (London, 1992). The following notes draw in part from this, and include the Rig Veda quotes in parentheses.

Harvey’s first musical idea for the piece was a sequence of four harmonies: a middle-register minor second, G–A flat; a pair of minor thirds pitched symmetrically around this, B–D–C sharp–E; another four-note chord a little higher, E flat–C–A–B flat, reading upward; and finally another minor second, now in the baritone register, F–G flat, this completing, with the chord before, a second symmetrical harmony around the

original G–A flat. The whole idea is thus a sounding-out of a symmetrical chord that includes all twelve tones and only four kinds of interval: minor seconds, minor and major thirds, and fourths. Symmetrical harmonies, and melodies made by stretching them out, feature prominently in the piece. Stretching the whole first idea out, rather than bunching it up into four chords, Harvey derived a twelve-tone melody, and this melody is inscribed through the entire work, movement by movement.

I. The opening movement therefore belongs to G. And, as the opening movement, it is appropriately elemental. The initial middle G floats from instrument to instrument, as well as from instrument to tape and back again, and is sometimes joined by shadows in higher or lower octaves. It urges toward its companion, A flat, and eventually gives birth to a trumpet melody. (*There was neither non-existence nor existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomlessly deep?... That one breathed, windless by its own impulse... Desire came upon that one in the beginning; that was the first seed of mind.*)

II. A tape solo, in symmetrical chords rising, like great wing beats, leads into a clarinet melody against a toccata for tape, piano, and eventually percussion. A clamor of joy from everyone concludes. (*Like impetuous winds, the drinks have lifted me up. Have I not drunk Soma?*)

III. The complete twelve-tone melody is heard, from a mixed quartet — oboe and clarinet, violin and viola — in unison, grandly slow. Extension of the melody, with decorative flurries, carries it out from this group to the full ensemble, at the same majestic tempo. (*She of the waters flashed lightning like a falling lightning-bolt and brought me the pleasures of love. From the water was born a noble, manly son... I, the lover of Urvaśi, long to draw her to me, though she fills the air and measures the middle realm of space.*)

IV. With no change of speed, the music reaches a region of suspense. Sound rises from silence and suggests, since the players are not strictly coordinated, a dawn chorus on another planet. As they gradually come together, the musicians settle on trills, and the tape, not heard in the preceding movement, comes forward. (*Purusha stretches the warp and draws the weft. Purusha has spread it out upon this dome of the sky. These are the pegs, that are fastened in place; the gods made the melodies into the shuttles for weaving.*)

V. A reprise of the melody, tape-led, leads into a cascade of refractions, with a coda for tuned percussion and string harmonics. (*No text.*)



VI. One of the shorter segments, this is also one of the more complex, careening in several directions simultaneously — except when the bass clarinet takes over for a solo — until it lifts off into the electronic treble. (*The celestial coursers, revelling in their strength, fly in a line like wild geese, the ends held back while the middle surges forward, when the horses reach the racecourse of the sky. Your body flies, Swift Runner; your spirit rushes like wind. Your mane, spread in many directions, flickers and jumps about in the forests.*)

VII. Bell sounds fill the air, recorded, performed, evoked. The section is almost entirely for tape, percussion, harp, and piano. (*When the drop came to the ocean, looking upon the wide expanse with the eye of a vulture, then the sun, rejoicing in the clear light, takes on his own names in the third realm.*)

VIII. Divine humor perhaps sets in, with a prelude for bass clarinet and trombone with tape. The low throbs here are recalled later in the movement, which goes on in contrasting delicacy and includes a harp-tape duet. (*Let them raise their voices, and let us raise our voices. Speak your speech to the stones that speak, when you stones, you mountains full of Soma, rush to bring the rhythmic sound to Indra... They speak loudly, excited by the exhilarating drink. They shout to Indra; they have found the honey. Artfully they danced with the sisters that embrace them, making the earth echo with their stampings. The eagles have sent their cry up to the sky. Ardently the dark hinds danced in the meadow. They plunge deep to the rendezvous with the lower stone; they infuse it with floods of the seed of the sun-bright one.*)

IX. Chimes of G in octaves. (*The quarters of the sky live on the oceans that flow out of her in all directions. The whole universe exists through the undying syllable that flows from her.*)

X. Starting in the depths, the tape sound rises at the arrival of the horn, which it eventually echoes. The movement is mostly a horn solo with tape, but ends with shimmering multicolored tremolos. (*Like a dancing girl, she puts on bright ornaments; she uncovers her breast as a cow reveals her swollen udder. Creating light for the whole universe, Dawn has opened up the darkness as cows break out from their enclosed pen. Her brilliant flame has become visible once more; she spreads herself out, driving back the formless black abyss.*)

XI. This, the longest movement, begins with the tape joined by bright treble instruments: flute and oboe. A long tape solo recalls the second movement, and then, in the second half, the melody becomes pulsing iterations. (*The bird carries in his heart Speech*

*that the divine youth spoke of inside the womb. The poets guard this revelation that shines like the sun in the footprint of Order. I have seen the cowherd who never tires, moving to and fro along the paths. Clothing himself in those that move towards the same centre but spread apart, he rolls on and on inside the worlds.)*

XII. At the start, while the ensemble holds the initial chord, the tape sounds out the four harmonies of the composer's first idea. Other ideas from earlier in the piece are resumed or reflected on the way to a reappearance of the basic melody, greeted by bells. There is a rare episode for strings alone before the ultimate ascent. (*We have drunk the Soma; we have become immortal; we have gone to the light; we have found the gods... O drop of Soma, flow for Indra.*)

Program Notes by Paul Griffiths

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# About the Artists

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**Ensemble Signal** is a large NY-based ensemble dedicated to offering the broadest possible audience access to a diverse range of contemporary works through performance, commissioning, recording, and education. Its Artist roster includes some of most gifted and innovative young musicians working in New York. Signal performs with conductor Brad Lubman, who founded the group along with cellist and co-artistic director Lauren Radnofsky. To form what *The New York Times* has described as “one of the most vital groups of its kind,” Lubman and Radnofsky assembled a “new music dream team” (*Time Out New York*) of independent artists who have worked closely with one another and Lubman over the last decade. Signal is flexible in size and instrumentation, enabling it to meet the demands of its diverse repertoire that ranges from Steve Reich to Helmut Lachenmann. Signal made its debut in Spring 2008 at the Bang on a Can Marathon in NYC and the Ojai Music Festival in California, earning praise for “deeply committed performances” (*Musical America*) of “gripping vehemence” (*Los Angeles Times*). At home in concert halls, clubs, and international festivals alike, Signal has performed at venues including Carnegie Hall’s Zankel Hall, The Tanglewood Music

Festival, The Guggenheim Museum (NYC), Miller Theatre, and (le)Poisson Rouge. Signal’s recordings include Philip Glass’s *Glassworks* and *Music in Similar Motion* (Philip Glass’s Orange Mountain label); and Sarah Kirkland Snider’s *Penelope* (New Amsterdam Records). 2012-13 recording releases include a CD and surround-sound DVD of music by Lachenmann, with the composer as soloist in *Zwei Gefühle* (Mode); Michael Gordon, David Lang, and Julia Wolfe’s *Shelter* (Cantaloupe); and Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians* and Pulitzer Prize-winning *Double Sextet* (Cantaloupe).

**Brad Lubman**, conductor/composer, has played a vital role in contemporary music for more than two decades. A frequent guest conductor of the world’s leading ensembles, he has gained widespread recognition for his versatility, commanding technique, and insightful interpretations. Conducting a broad range of repertoire from classical to contemporary works, Lubman has led major orchestras in Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Taiwan, and the U.S. Among these are the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Bayerische Rundfunk, Dresden Philharmonic, DSO Berlin, RSO Stuttgart, WDR Symphony

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Cologne, National Symphony Orchestra Taiwan, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Finnish Radio Symphony, and the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic. In addition, he has worked with some of the most important European and American ensembles for contemporary music, including Ensemble Modern, London Sinfonietta, Klangforum Wien, Musik Fabrik, ASKO Ensemble, Ensemble Resonanz, Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, Chicago Symphony MusicNOW, and Steve Reich and Musicians. Lubman has conducted at new-music festivals across Europe, including those in Lucerne, Salzburg, Berlin, Huddersfield, Paris, Cologne, Frankfurt, and Oslo. He has recorded for BMG/RCA, Nonesuch, Koch, and New World, among other labels. His own music has been performed in the USA and Europe, and can be heard on his CD, *insomniac*, on Tzadik. Brad Lubman is particularly noted for his ability to master challenging new scores in a variety of settings, a skill honed during his tenure as Assistant Conductor to Oliver Knussen at the Tanglewood Music Center from 1989-94. That aptitude has earned him the opportunity to premiere works by a wide range of composers, including Michael Gordon, Jonny Greenwood, David Lang, Helmut Lachenmann, Meredith Monk, Michael Nyman, Steve Reich, Augusta Read Thomas, Julia Wolfe, Charles Wuorinen, and John Zorn. Lubman is Music Director

of the new music ensemble Signal, founded in 2008. With critically praised performances at the Bang on a Can Marathon, Le Poisson Rouge (NYC), and the Ojai Music Festival, Signal has rapidly become a vital force in the American new music scene. Brad Lubman is on faculty at the Eastman School of Music and the Bang on a Can Summer Institute. He is represented by Karsten Witt Musik Management.

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# About Miller Theatre

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**Miller Theatre at Columbia University** is the leading presenter of new music in New York City and one of the most vital forces nationwide for innovative programming. In partnership with Columbia University School of the Arts, Miller is dedicated to producing and presenting unique events in dance, contemporary and early music, jazz, opera, and performance. Founded in 1988 with funding from John Goelet, Brooke Astor, and the Kathryn Bache Miller Fund, Miller Theatre has built a reputation for attracting new and diverse audiences to the performing arts and expanding public knowledge of contemporary music.

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# Upcoming Events

**Tuesday, October 23, 6:00 p.m.** (doors at 5:30 p.m.)

POP-UP CONCERTS

**Minimalism's Evolution**

Ensemble Signal

**Tuesday, October 30, 6:00 p.m.** (line forms at 5:00 p.m.)

SPECIAL EVENT

*St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University*

**Zorn Halloween Celebration**

David Fulmer, *solo violin*

John Zorn, *solo organ improvisation*

**Saturday, November 3, 8:00 p.m.**

JAZZ

**Rudresh Mahanthappa's Indo-Pak Coalition**

**Saturday, December 1, 8:00 p.m.**

EARLY MUSIC

*Church of St. Mary the Virgin (145 W. 46th Street, between 6th and 7th Aves.)*

**Masterpieces for Double Choir**

The Tallis Scholars

Peter Phillips, *director*

**Thursday, December 6, 8:00 p.m.**

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