

# COLLEGE OF MUSIC

2024-25



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UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

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The University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado's flagship university, honors and recognizes the many contributions of Indigenous peoples in our state. CU Boulder acknowledges that it is located on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute and many other Native American nations. Their forced removal from these territories has caused devastating and lasting impacts. While the University of Colorado Boulder can never undo or rectify the devastation wrought on Indigenous peoples, we commit to improving and enhancing engagement with Indigenous peoples and issues locally and globally.

# SoundWorks

Featuring CU NOW's Composer Fellows' Initiative  
and Koa String Quartet

7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 5, 2025

Grusin Music Hall

## PROGRAM

### The Earthworm Problem

Holly McMahan

Libretto by Holly McMahan

*Kristina Butler as Esmeralda*

*Katiann Nelson as Rue*

*Max Vann as Miles*

### The Heart of the Antarctic

Alan Mackwell

Libretto by Alan Mackwell, based on the book

by Ernest Shackleton

*Kristina Butler as Adams*

*Katiann Nelson as Brocklehurst*

*Simeon Wallace as Shackleton*

*Max Vann as Wild*

### Songs of a Soldier

JC Maynard

Libretto by JC Maynard

*Katiann Nelson as The Mother*

*Simeon Wallace as The Soldier*

*Max Vann as The Father*

# Pulse

Holly McMahon

- I. Impulse Begins to Spread
- II. Atrial Contraction
- III. Impulse Spreads from the AV Node
- IV. Ventricles Contract
- V. Ventricle Repolarization
- VI. At Rest

*Koa String Quartet:*

*Kisa Uradomo, violin*

*Leah Pernick, violin*

*Devin Cowan, viola*

*Heewon Lee, cello*

# The Dying of the Light

Adam Weller

*Anna Cummings, Eli Pouliot, and Bebe Seidenberg, violin*

*Michael Han, viola*

*Logan Kuhlman, Kate Fornshell, cello*

# PROGRAM NOTES

## The Earthworm Problem

Holly McMahan

Libretto by Holly McMahan

Rue: Miles,

What happened?

Miles: They were quick.

I was running.

Thank god you are home.

Rue: Who?

Miles: The earthworms.

They are after us -

All of us.

Rue: What?

Miles: They are vicious

I tried to run,

But there are so many.

Rue: Where are they?

Miles: I was in the town

to buy bread.

I was at the farmers market.

They are coming.

Rue: Buildings have fallen.

Miles: They move the soil underneath us.  
Before long . . .  
The earthworms are coming.

Rue: I can do something.  
I can do something!

Miles: You don't understand.

Rue: I can fix this.

Miles: They are earthworms!  
We cannot defeat them.

Rue: The rain will stop.  
It will be okay.  
I will find Esmeralda.

Miles: Don't go out there!  
You don't know where she is.

Rue: I can find her.

Miles: How?

Rue puts on a rain jacket

Miles: No!

Esmerelda: It was me.

Rue: What did you do?



Esmerelda: Her name was Anna....

I put her in the ground last May,  
to grow tomatoes in October...  
She was two months old.  
Just there,

I planted her  
in soil that was rich.  
I watered her every day,  
and told her she was beautiful.

Two weeks ago, two weeks ago,  
she wilted.  
Just there...  
It has been weeks,  
Since her last leaf hit the ground.

I told her I loved her then.  
That she was beautiful.  
I told her it was okay to fall apart -  
That I'd never forget the way she made me smile.  
And she did.

I took her last leaf,  
in my pocket,  
and I left.  
I ran into the forest -  
That is where I have been.

So it was me.  
I caused the rain.  
I have always caused the rain,  
and the grief will never go away.

# The Heart of the Antarctic

Alan Mackwell

Libretto by Alan Mackwell, based on the book  
by Ernest Shackleton

*Heart of the Antarctic* is a short three-scene opera inspired by the adventures of Ernest Shackleton from his memoir *The Heart of the Antarctic*. Shackleton and his crew endured the worst that Antarctica had to offer during their 1908-09 expedition, battling tough terrain, dysentery and impossibly horrible weather. And yet, despite these trials, Shackleton makes mention of the beauty of Antarctica on nearly every page, relishing the landscape in spite of its perils. The three scenes selected for *Heart of the Antarctic* are reflective of this duality between the brutal and beautiful, exploring the stillness of the icy vista while allowing the tension from its human occupants to disrupt the serenity of their surroundings.

*The three explorers on stage slowly sit up, and officially set up camp. Shackleton, Brocklehurst and Wild are seated in a semi-circle around the fire of their crude and rushed camp, and staring blankly at the flickering flames as they contemplate their near-death experience. Adams emerges from off-stage, carrying two parcels wrapped in cloth. He walks slowly and methodically towards his companions and sits down beside them.*

## **Scene III: Blood Tea**

Adams (spoken):

On our way here, weeks ago, we shot one of our struggling ponies.

*He pauses, taking a deep breath.*

Adams (spoken): His body lies beyond that hill, frozen solid.

*His companions look up from their trance, meeting his eyes.*



Adams (*spoken*): I have his liver, but not much else.

*Adams pulls the cloth from one of his parcels, revealing the late pony's liver. Shackleton takes it and places it on a pan, which he then places directly on top of the fire. Shackleton crouches beside the fire, testing the temperature of the pan with his bare fingers. It is still remarkably cold, so he does not recoil.*

*All four explorers eye the second parcel.*

Adams (*spoken*):

Beside the pony's corpse, his blood congealed and froze. This is that blood.

*Adams pulls the cloth off the second parcel and reveals a grisly mass of red. The explorers pause, unsure what to do, until Wild pulls a small saucepan from the side of his pack, takes the blood in his bare hands, and places it in the pan. He then places the pan on the fire for a moment, wiping his hands on his trousers. Shackleton flips the liver over.*

Wild (*spoken*): Give me your cups.

*Wild's companions reach for their cups and place them in a line in front of him. He opens the sauce pan and pours its contents evenly between the four cups. All four explorers take their cups and slowly drink.*

Shackleton (*singing*): It's like a beef tea.

*The explorers are unmoved by this bizarre statement, and continue slowly sipping their steaming cups of blood. They pause, stoic.*

Brocklehurst:

When we return to base, we should cook something beautiful.

*He pauses, his face lighting up as his imagination begins whirring. His companions sit up, half-smiling.*

Brocklehurst: Something like mincemeat,

Adams (*interjecting*): Made of-

Shackleton: Lamb meat-

Wild: Ground with-

Brocklehurst: Fennel-

A: Ground with-

S: Parsley-

W: Ground with-

B: Sage-

A: Mixed with-

S: Onion-

W: Mixed with-

B: Garlic-

A: Wrapped in-

S: Bacon-

W: Smoked with-

B: Hickory-

A: Wrapped in-

S: Pastry-

W: Toasted-

B: Golden brown-

A: Served with-

S: Greens-

W: Served with-

B: Fresh bread-

A: Served with-

S: With a-

W: With a-

B: With a-

A: With a-

S: Cup of-

W: Wine-

B: Cup of-

A: Tea-

S: Cup of-

W: Cocoa-

B: Cup of-

A: Tea-

S: Cup of-

W: Cocoa-

B: Cup of-

A: Tea-

S: Cup of-

W: Cocoa-

*The projection darkens, signaling performers to gradually fade away to silence. As they do, Aurora Australis briefly emerges on screen, blanketing the stage in ribbons of red and green. After a time, the projection fades to black.*

# Songs of a Soldier

JC Maynard

Libretto by JC Maynard

This scene follows the death of a soldier fallen in battle—his final moments imagining conversations with the most important figures in his life drawn out into a full nine minute scene. It begins with the soldier (Tenor) alone on stage, having just been hit by a gunshot. The soldier cowers in fear of the fate befallen him, and he collapses to the ground.

But before he slips away, he is “visited” in a hallucination first by his mother (Alto), who “heals” him for a moment to speak with her so that she may console him. She comforts him as he weeps, saying that there are more who will visit him after she has gone. His father (Bass) arrives next, and the soldier turns now to anger and regret, asking his father what was the point of the war and bloodshed. His father speaks to him of sacrifice for what is right, encouraging him to be strong. The final visitor is the soldier’s fiancée/lover (Soprano), who reflects fondly on their time together, lamenting the loss of her love. The mother and father briefly return to stage with the lover to say a final goodbye to the soldier, then leave him alone on stage for his final note.

Tenor: What have I done?  
What have I done?

## ***II. THE MOTHER***

Alto: Hush, my darling, don’t you be afraid of letting go,  
Your mother’s here,

Tenor: Is it really you?

Alto: Once a silly child, you’re grown. Now you will stay forever in my  
Memories as a boy,

Tenor: It's really you.

Alto:

Take my hand, be healed if only for this parting moment,  
So I can see those hazel eyes that came from me once more before they go

Tenor: But I can't help but tremble,  
I've not the strength to die,  
I can't help but fear, it hurts, the wound will never mend,  
I can't help but cry

Alto: I will stay beside you, calm your heart, and never leave  
Until your final breath  
But you've more to see you, speak with you,  
Say their goodbyes before the time takes what we've left

Both: Know that you have always filled my heart with love and home

Alto: Lay among the lilies, be at peace, so I may grieve you, my own boy.

### ***III. THE FATHER***

Bass: My boy, my son,  
My boy, my son,

Tenor: What has it come to? What am I fighting for?  
Men of my childhood slain in a bloody war?

Bass: I was in your shoes, I felt it too,  
The fear of sacrifice and what we lose.  
But I have walked this world and seen the price  
Of what we save, for what we give our lives.  
Trust me son, your death is not in vain.

Tenor: How can you leave me stranded alone to die?

B: (Courage now; be brave and you will fly...)  
Lies when you told me you would be by my side!

B: (...far away into the brighter skies)



Bass: Strength, my son,  
Faith, my son,  
Honor and valor,  
You have won.  
T: (I'm trying to be strong)

## Pulse

Holly McMahan

*Pulse* is a 10-minute-long representation of one heartbeat, as read on an electrocardiogram. It depicts the character of the different stages of one heartbeat, as the heart goes through cycles of electrical pulses and muscle contractions. A repetitive pulse can be heard throughout the piece until the last movement *At Rest*. These pulses are based off common heart rates. It should be noted that hearts are never truly inactive while we are alive, and each individual has a slightly different rhythm to each of their heart beats. The ratios between the lengths of the movements in this piece were based off of standard graphs in anatomy textbooks.

## The Dying of the Light

Adam Weller

*The Dying of the Light* is based on a 1951 poem by Dylan Thomas called “Do not go gentle into that good night.” I originally heard the poem in the movie *Interstellar*, where it is used to motivate the astronauts to fight against the dying earth, and to go out into the universe to find a new planet. But when I heard it, I immediately associated it with the idea of resisting and fighting against dimming hopes and dreams in my own life. I originally started writing this piece as a cinematic score to be produced electronically with synths and software instruments, but after finding a melody that I really liked, I felt that it would be more impactful as a strings piece. The first three lines of the poem read:

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

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Max Randal, piano

## Kristina Butler

Kristina Butler (soprano) has appeared as Ida in *Die Fledermaus*, Littler Daughter in *Proving Up*, Billie Jean King in *Balls* and in CU Now's 2024 Composer Fellows' Initiative. While at CU Boulder, Butler appeared as Lady Valerie in *Cabildo* and was a Graduate Division Finalist for the 2024 Concerto Competition. This summer, Butler was a festival singer with the Berlin Opera Academy where she role-studied Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*) and appeared as Lay Conversa in *Suor Angelica*. Butler is a 2021 recipient of the Fulbright Research Grant to Ecuador, where she produced a new music album, *Sueños de Zazá*. She studies with Professor Jennifer Bird-Arvidsson.

## Koa String Quartet

The Koa String Quartet is composed of violinists Kisa Uradomo (Maui, Hawai'i) and Leah Pernick (Metro Detroit, Michigan), violist Devin Cowan (Long Island, New York) and cellist Heewon Lee (O'ahu, Hawai'i). Koa is the Graduate String Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado Boulder, where they were the first prize winners of the 2024 Ekstrand Competition.

## **Alan Mackwell**

Described as “an original composer with new ideas and a command of complex symphonic writing” (BroadStreet Journal), New Zealand-American Alan Mackwell (b. 1998) is a BMI award-winning young composer and performer based in Boulder. In his work, Mackwell seeks to explore a unique blend of atmospheres inspired by his experiences in the Permian Basin, northern New Mexico and Appalachian North Carolina using a highly resonant and bluegrass-influenced musical language. He earned a BM at the Boston Conservatory and an MA at Tufts University. Mackwell is currently pursuing a DMA at the University of Colorado Boulder where he teaches an Intro to Music Technology course.

Mackwell’s music has been played on three different continents and several U.S. states. His compositions have been played by high-achieving groups such as The Philadelphia Youth Orchestra, The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, the Amorsima Trio, Hub New Music and the Corvus Ensemble. He was the grand prize winner of the Philadelphia Youth Orchestra’s Inaugural Young Composers’ Competition in addition to being a two-time finalist for the Todd Corporation Young Composers’ Awards hosted by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Mackwell is the winner of the 2023 American Prize as well as a BMI Student Composer Award, which he won in 2022 for his string trio *Remains of a Permian Gas Station*.

## **Joshua Carter (JC) Maynard**

Joshua Carter (JC) Maynard is a composer and conductor from Colorado Springs who specializes in bringing passion for choral and chamber music to a new generation of musicians. Currently studying composition at CU Boulder, Maynard never allows himself to be confined to one artistic box—instead, blending genres and disparate sources of inspiration in all his works. He was recently named ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award Semi-Finalist and Orpheus Chamber Singers Competition Second Place Finalist. In addition to composing for mediums like choir and orchestra to electronics and jazz combos, Maynard is the founder and president of the Renova New Music Ensemble—CU Boulder’s premier contemporary choral group.

Prioritizing collaboration and musician ownership in all his projects, Maynard has conducted and had pieces commissioned by groups such as the Colorado Vocal Arts Ensemble, the University of Wyoming Bel Canto Choir, the Colorado Springs Philharmonic, the CU Boulder Chamber Singers, Lírios String Quartet, the Denver Playground Ensemble, the Eklund Opera and more. Maynard also has experience as a producer and recording technician, an audio editor and mixing engineer, a private lesson instructor, a musical theater performer and an ensemble administrator.

## **Holly McMahon**

As a compelling performer and composer with a delicate yet expansive style, Holly McMahon has the ability to lift her hands from piano keys in complete silence. For many years she has worked with and connected countless musicians across several genres including film, theater, dance and contemporary performance. She continues to explore new instrumentations and stylistic choices through her studies of music composition, music technology and piano performance at The University of Colorado Boulder. She is most well known for her works for solo piano, which typically feature carefully sculpted, running lines and evocative yet comfortable rhythmic textures that have been described as “lush” and “uniquely vibrant.” As she focuses on creating atmosphere through the shape of sound over time and careful repetition, McMahon’s music is uniquely breathtaking and reminds listeners of their ability to experience art in a uniquely human way.

## **Katiann Nelson**

Katiann Nelson (mezzo soprano) is a second year master’s degree student studying with Professor Abigail Nims. Nelson has been seen in several Eklund Opera productions, including *Falstaff* (Meg), and *Proving Up* (Taller Daughter). She will also be singing in the chorus Opera Colorado’s production of *La Bohème* this February. Originally from Waterford, Wisconsin, Nelson graduated from Carthage College with undergraduate degrees in music education, piano and clarinet, and currently works as the accompanist and assistant director at St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church.

## Max Vann

Max Vann (baritone) is a second year master's student in vocal performance and pedagogy studying with Professor Andrew Garland. Originally from Georgia, he got an undergraduate degree from Georgia Southern University. Past roles Vann has performed have been Dr. Dave in *Choir Practice* (Chatman) and Pierre Lafitte in *Cabildo* (Beach). Vann has also performed various opera scenes and choruses with Eklund Opera and Vail Opera in last year's season.

## Simeon Wallace

Simeon Wallace (tenor), is from the foothills of North Carolina. He has a passion for exploring the compositions of Black composers who intricately crafted idiomatic classical compositions through the lens of African American culture. He has featured in a masterclass on African American song with Louise Toppin, editor of *An Anthology of African and African Diaspora Songs*. Recently, he portrayed Miles in Missy Mazzoli's *Proving Up* and Fenton in Verdi's *Falstaff* with Eklund Opera. He holds a BM in music education from Appalachian State and is pursuing an MM in vocal performance and pedagogy from CU Boulder under Nicholas Perna.

## Adam Weller

Adam Weller started playing the violin at age 4 and since then he continued to perform while developing a passion for music composition. He started by arranging and composing music for his high school chamber orchestra, and has since narrowed his focus onto film music. He is currently a third year, double-degree student in neuroscience and violin performance, and he hopes to pursue a career in film scoring after he graduates.

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