PERFORMERS

Joseph Lee, Conductor
Rebekah Alexander, Soprano
John Logan Wood, Tenor
Ryan Cockman, Violin
Joshua Dent, Cello
Céline Thackston, Flute
Emily Bowland, Clarinet
Mark Volker, Electric Guitar
Megan Gale, Piano
Jesse Strauss, Percussion
Sebastian Buhts, Percussion

Video Art: Christine Rogers
Creative Advisor: Suzanne Edwards

Recording Engineer, Mixing, and Mastering
by Kevin Edlin
Video Directed and Edited by Lauren Balthrop
Assisted by James Mitchell
Ryan Featherstun, Director of Photography

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INTRODUCTION
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PAVILIONS TO THE SKY
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DAWN
DEBATE 2
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THE BELLS OF ETERNITY
RESOLUTION

BODY AND SOUL, AFTER THE PLAGUE
INTRO

(Narrator)
As I lay on a winter’s night, before the dawn, in a time of feud and plague
I saw (there) a remarkable sight, a body, wan,
its consciousness weak and vague
It had been a proud man who’d richly lived, sated his head and his heart
but now he’d lost the animating light, his spirit out, preparing itself to depart
But as it moved to leave, it turned around, beholding the body from which
it came
It spoke with a sorrowful wailing sound, bemoaning its fate and
assigning blame.
It said...

WOE TO YOUR FLESH

(Soul)
Woe to your flesh, your blood
It’s only worth despair.
You were once quite eager, so brazen, when alive,
To declare false judgements, to change two for five.
Woe to your flesh, your blood
Look how you lie here now.
You were wild and wanton, so filled with foolish pride.
Now you’ll find your judgement, your witness will decide you.
Pretension and bluster surrounded you in life
So now your immortal soul is bleeding from your mortal knife.
Woe to your flesh,
your foulest blood.
As you were once so hungry, devouring all you see.
So the worms now eat you and you’ve brought the pain of hell on me.

PAVILIONS TO THE SKY

(Body)
When I was young and small
I never thought I’d live as I did;
As all the wealthy men and women have before.
I never thought I’d drink such wine;
never smell the golden saffron.
With everything I earned I seized the greatest pleasures.
I built pavilions to the sky.
I lived in shining splendor free upon the sea.
Now death has come to tear my breath away from me.
Soul, you condemn me. If you have such pain,
you only have yourself to blame.
Listen closely, hear my call,
the proud are the first to fall,
but I won’t take the blame for all.
All my catastrophes, all my desires,
you could have saved us from this all.
If God made you in his own image
then why did you let me go astray
You could have led us both another way
It’s your neglect that brought us to this day
I learned to follow you, I set to serve your pleasure. We built pavilions
to the sky.
You led me to my fortunes, now we both are lost.

DEBATE 1

(Soul)
I never led you to misfortune.
The more that you lived,
the more you failed.
(Body)
Could it be that this is my soul,
that condemns me for my transgressions? Improperly it seems to me.
My heart breaks that death struck me so.
I am not the first, nor shall I be the last.
There is none so clever that he is left behind.
I’ve fully drunk the cup, there’s nothing I’ve declined. The proudest be
the first to keep his tongue.
I knew very well that I shall rot:
An even Alexander and Caesar
such that no one can find a trace of them,
or of the mothers who bore them.
You’re blaming me
when it’s you who have failed
when fateful choices came to us
Your saintly judgement failed
(Both)
Be silent!
(Soul)
Tis I who did enlighten you.
(Body)
Tis I who listened to you.
(Soul)
You throw at me these vile curses,
yet lie there swollen as a leather bottle.
(Both)
For all the flaws you have brought the world
did you expect peace?

DAWN

(Body)
Craving pleasure, I only sought to live.
(Soul)
But pleasures fade.
(Body)
I believed my joys would never end
(Soul)
I believed you knew your joys would never end.
Where are your golden chambers now?

Soul
You bear the blame for all the shame that plagues you now.

I’ll say it now with pithy prose:
You’re bathing in your own corruption.

Body
Save a penitent soul from a villainous host.

Mary, Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost
My conduct won’t concern you anymore.

Turn away you wretched soul,
All you buddies and mates have run away.

You’ll no longer live to dance and play
While lower men were left to their afflictions.

You welcomed wealthy men into your home
You didn’t care whose labor served you.

You took from the poor and drained the world.

Your fancy furs,
Your fancy furs,
Your fancy furs, your castle and vineyard,
All your wealth and goods,
Your palfreys and steeds,
Your fine houses and halls.

The bonds that you’re in, they’ll cast me to hell. Your fancy furs, palmyra and sheews,
All your wealth and goods,
you’ll not bear them with you wretch, where you lie.

You’ve lived too long wrought so much pain,
So erratic and false, always playing games.

You left me to wander the paths proper to only fools.
You rather could have given me wisdom’s tools.

All my defenses came from what you disclosed
All that I know I did I learned from you.

You made a servant of me, imprisoned in your breast.
I cast all my love on you, gave you rest.
You say that I made you my servant, that’s outrageous.
You were taught to learn from me, but it was you who moved.

As I confronted all your messes, you betrayed me.
I did all I could to bring harmony when you had lost your way.
But you did all you could to just bring me pain.

All my quarrels and our condemnations, pointed fingers, won’t restore these bones.

We’ll have nothing more than the space beneath our heads when we are gone.

Our brightest fires are sparked by the flint of death.

And here you’ll be until you drift away.
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And here you’ll be until you drift away.
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You were taught to learn from me, but it was you who moved.

As I confronted all your messes, you betrayed me.
I did all I could to bring harmony when you had lost your way.
But you did all you could to just bring me pain.

We’ve seen plague before, we’ve known its expectations,
And you will travel into darkness.
It had to be this way.

Wore them over a man or woman came from dying, clear of evil’s breath.
Such a one would never risk their comfort.

Our brightest fires are sparked by the flint of death.

When the floor is at my back, and the roof is at my nose,
We will part and end our sacred pairing, end our union, we’ll go on alone.

All our quarrels and our condemnations, pointed fingers, won’t restore these bones.

Sadness waits for us.
Now we suffer for our mortal follies, parting sorrows,
When we lived in the mortal kingdom, I concealed your slides to mortal vice.
As we’re separated now, those memories afflict me so,
And you will travel into darkness.
It had to be this way.

All our forms, words, songs.
We will leave behind all that we have made,
We will leave behind all that we have made,
We will leave behind all that we have made.

We’ll have nothing more than the space beneath our heads when we are gone.
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When chatterbird approached me about composing a large-scale work for them, I was thrilled and flattered. I have enormous respect for their work. In addition to their exceptional artistry, they have carved out a unique space in the musical world. Led by Colin Thubron, chatterbird has gone beyond the important work bringing stylistically varied modern music to the mid-South. They have created a body of work that demonstrates respect for adventurous composers, performers, and audience alike, creating a wonderful creative space for all involved. Therefore, it was important to me that I respond with a project worthy of chatterbird’s singular talents.

Not long before, my dear friend Suzanne Edwards had first introduced me to the medieval “Body and Soul” debate poetry, and suggested we collaborate on a project that used some of them as source materials for a large-scale musical work. This group of poems is a particular area of research interest for her, as a specialist in medieval studies. The two particular poems she chose moved me in a very profound way. Through dramatic renderings of a debate between a body and soul as they face death, these texts explore the nature of the human condition and our place within a shared community. The style, by turns grim, solemn, and irreverent, appealed to side of my personality first cultivated during my Catholic upbringing. This felt like the perfect project for the chatterbird commission.

I have known for some time that I fear death. The fickleness of life is something that perennially scares me. Like most humans, I value the richness and experience of life, so it disturbs me to think that one day this will come to an end. One way to confront this fear is to consider why and how we live, both as individuals and as a community. These poems struck me as powerful expressions of such a consideration. They may lead to a fascination with grim subjects, but the ongoing questions of how and why we live and the way we do can lead to crucial personal answers.

In spite of my enthusiasm for the texts, I was unsure about the best way to approach them musically. I believe that one should only set text to music if there is something fresh to be found in doing so. This is such rich and expressive poetry on its own, but even in translations, it is also very dense and filled with rhetorical connotations foreign to modern readers or listeners. Such conceptually rich, subtle texts are incredibly difficult to apply to large-scale musical structures. We decided that I would mix paraphrased sections of Suzanne’s translation with more direct versions of it to evoke the combination of timelessness and timeliness that we wanted to achieve. I even decided to include the sound of Suzanne reading some of the original Middle English text to provide a direct link to the medieval source, and to exploit the mystical quality of the original language.

Music is particularly capable of broadly powerful gestures, as well as delicacy with indefinite meaning. These texts call for vibrant expression that, while inviting interpretation, allows for cerebral consideration of specific meanings. Writing strictly for a traditional, concert music instrumentation felt insufficient for the task. This led me to consider a multimedia approach with some less conventional elements: an electric guitar incorporated into a chamber music setting, sound synthesis and processing of the acoustic instruments, and a video component. The electronic guitar and digital sound synthesis/processing have played roles in many of my past musical works. The mixture of acoustic instruments with amplified, synthetic, and processed sound provides a fantastic sound palette for illustrating and illuminating the fresh versus spirit components of the text. From a very early point, such electro-acoustic elements were a significant part of the conception for the piece.

In addition, a visual element felt like a very natural fit as well. The presence of intentional imagery during a musical performance has the potential to broaden the sensory range of the work. This can of course be very literal, in a music video or narrative film format, but I felt this work would be best served by a more abstract, but calculated approach. I had admired Christine Rogers’ work for some time, particularly her video to accompany performances of Peter Maxwell Davies’ musical work. One Stage. I appreciated the way Christine used a photographer’s eye for expression, still moments in slowing-developing video clips. The images themselves were not inherently abstract (the events and objects they capture are generally quite clear), but the concepts expressed are less obvious and open for multiple interpretations. I felt that, in conjunction with a musical and text setting, this could be very effective at drawing out fresh ideas from the “Body and Soul” poetry.

There is at once both an immediate and hypnotic quality to Christine’s images, beautifully distilling the experience of the piece. The immediacy lies in the very modern, corporeal aspects of the imagery, some emotional, some beguilingly prosaic. There are real, natural places and people living lives not unlike that referenced in the poetry. The hypnotic quality comes from the indistinct, but dynamic nature of much of the images. We are people experiencing real but unspecified emotions, and elemental settings with haunting mist, interaction, birds, and fire. Then there is the central image of the whole piece: two pieces of dry ice lie against a block of conventional ice, melting into one another as they slowly lose their substance, much as the body and soul of the poetry. It is a potent tableau that eerily binds together the entire piece.

While Suzanne and I had discussed the relationship of the medieval bubonic plague to the poetry as early as January of 2020, the fact that the poems were written during and immediately after plague outbreaks became especially pertinent in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Suzanne, Christine, and I all worked on our respective components of this piece in the shadow of this plague, with the belief that we were creating a piece of art that could inspire critical assessment of our culture and thinking as we entered the period of recovery. The poetry depicts a debate between the flesh and spirit of a person trying to understand the meaning of their life and death. But as Suzanne taught me so well, haunting the entire piece is the idea of trying to understand our place in a shared community. Regardless of how an audience for After the Plague: Body and Soul perceives the work, it is this critical consideration of our role in the world community that I hope comes out clearly.
After the Plague emphasizes this balance by following Soul’s opening lament with forth and the body says little or nothing in its own defense. Yet, in “Thestri” and moral high ground. And so it did in earlier medieval texts where the soul holds Body is consumed by worms, and Soul is destined to suffer in hell. At first, it rather than unselfish virtues that would have enduring value after death; now habitual indulgence of carnal desires for goods that have now passed away the Soul castigating the Body (II. “Woe to Your Flesh”). Soul laments Body’s later, in the context of another global pandemic during which more than three million people have so far died. These debate poems ask: How do the relation attachments that they recognize as responsible for their current plight. For instance, Body denies that it is a villain in its own company with famous pagans—Alexander and Caesar—whose ethics, in medieval Christian thought, were compromised. In “Debate 2,” Soul is casting shadows about where Body’s earthly pleasures and lands have gone suggest that Soul, too, feels the sense of lost that it attributes to Body’s foolishness. Later, Soul reminds Body that such kindness for luxury conscripted self-forms, in its lack of regard for virtue, as well as an injury to human community more broadly—“You took from the poor and drained the world.” But Soul, in directing this lesson to Body without acknowledging its longing for what has been lost, makes the very error it criticizes.

As the debate unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that both parties, in refusing responsibility and accusing the other, operate from a flawed premise. Body and Soul together comprised the living person whose death now occasions their retrospective. The recriminations that structure their dialogue hint that the living had been an animal who never knew right from wrong, it acknowledges that it your eye,” it exposes the fundamental misrecognition that characterizes the body-soul debates may work as a form of popular vernacular instruction about the eternal consequences of incomplete confession as well as a historical model for self-reproach and forever. In “Debate 1,” Body and Soul, through a song, consumed by worms, while devils seize Soul and subject it to guerriques that parody the moral errors the person made in life. In Body and Soul, Against the Plague, “The Body of Diversity” revises the mechanics of these attachments as ethical norms associated with resurrection and mercy are electronically stretched and processed to make sense.

In the medieval poems, these terrifying tales present a definitive final word on the debate between Body and Soul, and the narrators affirm a clear moral lesson. In “Thores,” the narrator says, “when the floor is at your headstone, the roof is at your nose [i.e., in the grave].” All the joy of this world is not worth— a pea.” In “Als I Lay,” the narrator reflects on his or her sinfulness and urges all to confess themselves and repent sore.” Yet, the apparent simplicity and clarity of these moral lessons is belied by the fact that neither Body nor Soul ever disputed them. They knew them and still couldn’t act on them. What kind of self-revelation will allow for the further knowledge of life is transitory. To build more ethical relationships with others? The poems don’t offer a clear answer to that question. By exposing in the ways the debates persistently reproduce and defer moral accountability, the writing of Mark Volker’s Body and Soul. After the Plague highlights this unsettled open-endedness, asking audiences to consider how we will act on our own witness to mortality.
I was excited to be approached by Mark Volker to create a video to accompany his striking and epic piece of music, *Body and Soul*. Making a video in response to a piece of music is a fascinating and special opportunity for me as my practice tends to be primarily photographic. When Mark told me about the concept of the *Body and Soul* debate poem, the central image of a block of dry ice and a block of conventional ice balancing against one another emerged in my head.

As time passes, these monoliths will fuse, evaporate, melt: they are always changing until one is gone. Two equal statues at first, as one leaves the other, the other becomes more of a shell and an echo of its past.

The motif is the main thread of the work, and it is juxtaposed with imagery of people statuesquely posed in front of landscapes: stony, eyes closed, removed from the world they are inhabiting. These human figures are intended to reflect back to the image of the ice blocks. The piece is linked together with frenetic, musical and energetic moments of nature: birds swarming a tree, flowers blowing on the side of a hill, smoke rising from the woods*. All of these things are intended to be a present-day meditation on the *Body and Soul* debate.

Christine Rogers, 2021

* A significant amount of footage from this video was created in India, a place that feels like a second home to me. As I write this, the second wave of COVID-19 has created a humanitarian crisis. Please consider donating to UNICEF efforts in India or one of the many fundraisers on covid.giveindia.org.
Composer and guitarist Mark Volker is Professor of Music at the Belmont University School of Music, where he is Coordinator of Composition Studies, and he directs the New Music Ensemble. He received degrees in Composition and Guitar Performance from the University of Chicago (Ph.D.), the University of Cincinnati (Master of Music), and Ithaca College (Bachelor of Music). Known for his colorful harmonic language and orchestration, as well as his facility with both electronic and traditional instrumentations, Mark’s music has been performed and recorded by numerous performers around the world, including the Chicago Contemporary Chamber Players, night blackbird, the Fission String Quartet, Musica moderna Poland, the Wind Ensemble, the New York New Musi Ensemble, the Graphos Trio, the Kim Philharmonie, the Orchestra of the Finger Lakes, So Percussion, Luna Nova, the Orquesta de Baja California, the Boston Brass, the Society for New Music, the Cold Fusion Ensemble, the Young Opera Company of New England, and the Nashville Ballet. His music has also been featured at many music festivals and conferences, including the Cincinnati MusicX festivals, the New Music Ensemble and flutist John McMurtery.

In addition, the wide ranging subjects of his writings and research run from fifteenth century English music to modern electroacoustic music. A native of Buffalo, NY, Mark holds degrees from the Ithaca College School of Music (BM), the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (MM), and the University of Chicago (Ph.D.). He has studied composition with Greg Woodard, Dana Wilson, Ricardo Zule-Maldon, David Haskell, Shuliaret Korn, Samuel Adler, and Maria Plassniski, electroacoustic music with Howard Swadoff and Una Helmuth, and classical guitar with Pablo Cohen. Edward Flower, Fred Hand, and John Swamin. Prior to his appointment at Belmont, Mark taught at College University. He lives in Franklin, TN with his wife Alyssa and two children, Molly and Jacob.

Mark is an active guitarist, specializing in the performance of new music for classical and electric guitar in chamber settings. He has premiered numerous chamber and solo works and performs regularly with the Luna Nova Ensemble and flutist John McMurtery.

Christine Rogers (born 1982, Cincinnati, Ohio) lives and works in Nashville, Tennessee. She received her BA in anthropology from Oberlin College in 2004 and her MA in studio art from Tufts University in 2008. She has exhibited widely across the United States and was in a two-person show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Santiago, Chile, in the fall of 2012 and at MoCA Tucson in 2018. She is a two-time Fulbright Senior Research Scholar for India (2012-2013 and 2018-2019). Her first solo show in India was in the spring of 2013 at a Shanthi Road Gallery in Bangalore, Karnataka and she has since shown again in Mumbai in group shows at Clerk House Initiatives, Project 88, and Sherrndal Prescot. Her work has been written about in Time Out Bengaluru, The Bangalore Mirror, The Hindu, New Landscape Photography, Hyperallergic, Dazed Digital, Brawnawy, The Tennessean, and The Nashville Scene. She is an Associate Professor of Photography at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee.

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REBEKAH ALEXANDER, SOPRANO

A strong advocate of contemporary music, Rebelah Alexander has performed works by John Hepple, George Crumb, Vincent Gigante, George Antheil, Oswald Ghiselli, Elliot Carter, and Kayo D.watch as well as the premiers of new compositions by Quintero Quintero, Tanya Arnold, Elan Man, Academy of the West, and the Aspen Music Festival. Megan is sought after as a collaborative partner by an array of performers and has presented more than 400 recitals during her career. In Nashville she is currently in the position of the faculty of Vanderbilt University, as a collaborative pianist. Megan performs frequently on the Nashville Symphony chamber music series and for the Ascendence Council and has more recently played with the Aladi Chamber Ensemble. She previously held positions at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, the American Music Festival, the William Bennett Spring Academy, and the Gateway Chamber Orchestra. In her free time Megan enjoys running, reading, and hanging out with her 7-year-old daughter Heidi and her husband, bass player Tim Parallel.

MEEGAN DANE, PIANO

Born in Tokyo, Meegean Dane grew up on Whidby Island in Washington State. She holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and the University of Southern California and has been an important part of the University of Sheridan's Music Academy of the West, and the Aspen Music Festival. Meegean is sought after as a collaborative partner by an array of performers and has presented more than 400 recitals during her career. In Nashville she is currently in the position of the faculty of Vanderbilt University, as a collaborative pianist. Meegean performs frequently on the Nashville Symphony chamber music series and for the Ascendence Council and has more recently played with the Aladi Chamber Ensemble. She previously held positions at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, the American Music Festival, the William Bennett Spring Academy, and the Gateway Chamber Orchestra. In her free time Megan enjoys running, reading, and hanging out with her 7-year-old daughter Heidi and her husband, bass player Tim Parallel.

JOSEPH LEE, CONDUCTOR

Joseph Lee serves as Resident Conductor of the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, Music Director of the Huntsville Youth Orchestra, and conductor of the Huntsville Youth Symphony and the Seniors Orchestra. Mr. Lee is the Principal Conductor of the Concerto International de Musica Pochote (Costa Rica). Music Director of Music Ministers of East and United Methodist Church of Nashville, and serves on the conducting staff of the Sewanee Summer Music Festival. In addition to his regular conducting engagements, Mr. Lee frequently travels to the Southeast US and Central America leading clinics, adjudicating band and orchestra festivals, and guest conducting. Mr. Lee has participated in music festivals and master classes both at home and abroad. He graduated cum laude from Vanderbilt University.

JESSE STARR, PERCUSSION

Jesse Strauss specializes in chamber music, orchestral music, and improvised music for dance & film. A graduate of Belmont University, he studied percussion under Christopher Norton focusing heavily on keyboard percussion repertoire. As an accompanist and performer, he has worked with Nashville based dance companies companies, TABA Dance, Belmont University Department of Dance, Nashville Mallet Ensemble, Brazilian Percussion Ensemble, the New York New Music Ensemble, and has performed as a collaborative partner by an array of performers and has presented more than 400 recitals during her career. In Nashville she is currently in the position of the faculty of Vanderbilt University, as a collaborative pianist. Meegean performs frequently on the Nashville Symphony chamber music series and for the Ascendence Council and has more recently played with the Aladi Chamber Ensemble. She previously held positions at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, the American Music Festival, the William Bennett Spring Academy, and the Gateway Chamber Orchestra. In her free time Megan enjoys running, reading, and hanging out with her 7-year-old daughter Heidi and her husband, bass player Tim Parallel.

JOHN LOGAN WOOD, TENOR

Based in Nashville since 2015 John Logan Wood ensemble of the Nashville Opera in the company’s productions of Mozart’s Don Giovanni, George Bizet’s Carmen, as well as Turandot and Tosca by Giacomo Puccini. Since then John Logan has also served as a Concert Artist for a tenor staff singer, performing starring choral works by composers ranging from William Byrd to Ars Nova. He has served as music director and pianist for several local non-profit theaters such as FourSquare Players and RE:Orrange Inc., accompanied various recitals of Western Kentucky University, and has given recitals for the Nashville Symphony, the Nashville Ballet, and the Nashville Symphony. Mr. Lee has participated in music festivals and master classes both at home and abroad. He graduated cum laude from Vanderbilt University.

JOSEPH LEE, CONDUCTOR

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