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New Commission by Nico Muhly to Premiere in Guggenheim's 'Works & Process' Holiday Concert

By BWV News Desk
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In the Guggenheim Museum's iconic rotunda, celebrate the season with the joyous sounds of holiday music and a new Works & Process commission by composer Nico Muhly, December 17 & 18, 2017.

Inspired by the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World's interpretation of the oldest song in the world, this Works & Process commission is an extension of Lenka Clayton and Jon Rubin's project ...circle through New York, a part of the Guggenheim Social Practice initiative. George Steel conducts the Vox Vocal Ensemble in what has become a revered annual tradition.

About the Oldest Song in the World and . . . circle through New York.

A talking parrot, a high school drama class, a Punjabi TV show, the oldest song in the world, a museum artwork, and a congregation's call to action circle through New York (2017) is a project by Lenka Clayton and Jon Rubin that brought together diverse communities often separated by cultural, economic, geographic, or circumstantial boundaries. For the piece, the artists drew an imaginary circle through New York City and invited six public venues along the circle's path to participate in a system of social and material exchange. These spaces, which included a pet store, a high school, a TV network, an academic research institute, the Guggenheim, and a church, served as the project's cocreators and hosts. Clayton and Rubin worked with the venues to select aspects of their identities-referenced in the project's full title-that rotated among the six locations on a monthly basis from March to August. By encouraging moments of mutual cooperation and collaboration, . . . circle through New York forged a shifting network of social relations founded on quiet humor, empathy, and the power of art to transform reality.

For its contribution, the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW)-a center for advanced scholarly research, graduate education, and exhibitions at New York University that cultivates and presents comparative, connective investigations of the ancient world-chose to circulate the "Hurrian Hymn," which is the earliest-known song to be recorded in writing, dating to around the thirteenth century BCE. The song was notated in cuneiform on a clay tablet, which was discovered at the site of ancient Ugarit (present-day Ras Shamra, 1 km from the Mediterranean coast in northern Syria) and is now in the collection of the National Museum of Damascus. Although the original lyrics and musical notation are imperfectly understood, scholars believe the hymn was written to promote fertility and refers to offerings and libations made to Nikkal, the goddess of the moon. In recent decades the song has been arranged and transcribed into a Western score, allowing contemporary musicians to perform new versions of it.

One such interpretation was commissioned by ISAW in 2015, when it was transcribed and performed by scholar and musician Joan Borrell. Through the course of . . . circle through New York, this version of the "Hurrian Hymn" was subsequently sung by the Guggenheim staff in the museum galleries; performed during services by the congregation of St. Philip's Church in Harlem; played at Pet Resources in the Bronx at a pitch audible only to dogs; learned and reworked by students at Frank Sinatra School of the Arts in Queens; and turned into a Bollywood music video by the team at Jus Broadcasting, also in Queens. Tonight, the Oldest Song in the World is featured as an extension of this ongoing system of engagement and reinterpretation.

. . . circle through New York has been commissioned as part of Guggenheim Social Practice, an initiative launched in 2016 in which artists and the museum collaborate to foster new forms of public and community engagement.

Nico Muhly (b.1981) is an American composer and sought-after collaborator whose influences range from American minimalism to the Anglican choral tradition. The recipient of commissions from The Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall, St. Paul's Cathedral, and others, he has written more than 80 works for the concert stage, including the forthcoming opera Marnie. Muhly is a frequent collaborator with choreographer Benjamin Millepied and, as an arranger, has paired with Sufjan Stevens, Antony and The Johnsons and others. His work for stage and screen include music for the Broadway revival of *The Glass Menagerie* and scores for films including the Academy Award-winning *The Reader*. Born in Vermont, Muhly studied composition at the Juilliard School before working as an editor and conductor for Philip Glass. He is part of the artist-run record label

Bedroom Community, which released his first two albums, *Speaks Volumes* (2006) and *Mothertongue* (2008). He lives in New York City.

The American John Corigliano continues to add to one of the richest, most unusual, and most widely celebrated bodies of work any composer has created over the last forty years. Corigliano's scores, now numbering over one hundred, have won him the Pulitzer Prize, the Grawemeyer Award, four Grammy Awards, and an Academy Award ("Oscar") and have been performed and recorded by many of the most prominent orchestras, soloists, and chamber musicians in the world. Attentive listening to this music reveals an unconfined imagination, one which has taken traditional notions like "symphony" or "concerto" and redefined them in a uniquely transparent idiom forged as much from the post-war European avant garde as from his American forebears. Perhaps one of the most important symphonists of his era, Corigliano has to date written three symphonies, each a landscape unto itself. Scored simultaneously for wind orchestra and a multitude of wind ensembles, Corigliano's ambitious, extravagant, and grandly barbarous *Symphony No. 3: Circus Maximus* (2004) was commissioned by the University of Texas at Austin Wind Ensemble, who presented it on their 2008 tour in Europe and gave its New York première in 2005 at Carnegie Hall. Naxos releases its stereo recording of *Circus Maximus* in January 2009, and has chosen the work as its début recording in its upcoming Blu-Ray format. *Symphony No. 2* (2001), a rethinking and expansion of the surreal and virtuosic *String Quartet* (1995), was introduced by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 2000 and earned him the 2001 Pulitzer Prize in Music. *Symphony No. 1* (1991), commissioned by *Meet the Composer* for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra when he was composer-in-residence, channeled Corigliano's personal grief over the loss of friends to the AIDS crisis into music of immense power, color, drama, and scope: performed worldwide by over 150 orchestras and twice recorded, this symphony earned him the Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition.

George Steel is a NYC based musician who has been working in New York and around the world for 25 years as a conductor, a composer, a producer, a singer, a pianist, a musicologist, and a teacher. He is founder and conductor of two groups, the Vox Vocal Ensemble (1990) and the Gotham City Orchestra (1998). Some of his notable concerts include Stravinsky's orchestral music at the Park Avenue Armory, Bach's B-Minor Mass in New York and at Caramoor, Feldman's Rothko Chapel in a live radio broadcast, "Treasures of the Sarum Rite" with the Trinity Church choir, and an all-John Zorn program in Helsinki with the Avanti! Orchestra. Steel is active as a composer of both concert music and musical theater. In 2016, for his work as a composer/lyricist, Steel was awarded the BMI Jerry Harrington Award "for outstanding creative achievement in musical theater.". His commissioned concert work "The Three Kings" received its premiere in the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum in 2012. The New York Times described it as "a raucous dance party, complete with percussion outbursts and syncopated brass rhythms."

The Vox Vocal Ensemble, called "superb" by the New York Times, was founded by George Steel in 1992 to perform the music of the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. Since that time, Vox has become one of the most sought-after vocal ensembles in New York, performing in such varied contexts as an all-Stravinsky festival at the Park Avenue Armory, acclaimed performances of Bach's Mass in B minor in New York City and at Caramoor, and in a Nico Muhly portrait concert at Carnegie Hall.

Described by The New York Times as "an exceptional opportunity to understand something of the creative process," for over 33 years and in over 500 productions, New Yorkers have been able to see, hear, and meet the most acclaimed artists in the world, in an intimate setting unlike any other. Works & Process, the performing arts series at the Guggenheim, has championed new works and offered audiences unprecedented access to generations of leading creators and performers. Most performances take place in the Guggenheim's intimate Frank Lloyd Wright-designed 285-seat Peter B. Lewis Theater. In 2017, Works & Process established a new residency and commissioning program, inviting artists to create new works, made in and for the iconic Guggenheim rotunda. Learn more at worksandprocess.org.