

Saturday, September 27, 2025, 8pm
Hertz Hall

Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen, *countertenor*
John Churchwell, *piano*
Uncharted

PROGRAM

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| Erich Wolfgang KORNGOLD (1897–1957) | Selections from <i>Lieder des Abschieds</i> ,
Op. 14 (1920–21)
I. Sterbelied
III. Mond, so gehst du wieder auf
IV. Gefaßter Abschied |
| H. Leslie ADAMS (1932–2024) | “Prayer” from <i>Nightsongs</i> (1961) |
| Florence PRICE (1887–1953) | “Sunset” (1938) |
| George Frideric HANDEL (1685–1759) | “O Lord, Whose Mercies Numberless”
from <i>Saul</i> (1738) |
| Clara SCHUMANN (1819–1896) | “Ich stand in dunklen Träumen,”
Op. 13, No. 1 (1844) |
| Johannes BRAHMS (1833–1897) | “In meiner Nächte Sehnen,” Op. 57, No. 5
(c. 1871)
“Unbewegte laue Luft,” Op. 57, No. 8 (c. 1871) |
| Max JANOWSKI (1912–1991) | “Avinu Malkeinu” (1967) |
| Maurice RAVEL (1875–1937) | “Kaddish” from <i>Deux mélodies hébraïques</i>
(1914) |

INTERMISSION

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| Jake HEGGIE (b. 1961) | “Oh Children”
Three Poems by Margaret Atwood
(2025, West Coast Premiere)
The Moment
Cicadas
Oh Children
<i>Commissioned for the artists by the Merola Opera Program</i> |
| Robert Schumann (1810–1856) | <i>Liederkreis</i> , Op. 39 (1840)
In der Fremde
Intermezzo
Waldesgespräch
Die Stille
Mondnacht
Schöne Fremde
Auf einer Burg
In der Fremde
Wehmut
Zwielicht
Im Walde
Frühlingsnacht |

This performance is made possible in part by Bernice E. Greene.



Welcome to *Uncharted*! With this program, I am embarking on my debut American recital tour along with my friend and collaborator John Churchwell, and I am so excited to present some of my favorite pieces for you. John and I are both proud to call the East Bay home, so it is very special for us to be presenting this recital here in Berkeley tonight. This program is centered around three sets of German lieder that feature on our recently released album, *Uncharted*. These German songs have never been professionally recorded by a countertenor before, and many have likely never before been sung by one, too. Tonight, we're heading into uncharted territory for a countertenor, and it brings me great joy to dig into music that speaks deeply to my artistic soul while breaking the mold along the way.

The program begins with three selections from Korngold's *Lieder des Abschieds* (*Songs of Farewell*), a stunning collection exploring the unwilling separation from one's love. There is a bit of foreshadowing here, as Korngold would have to flee his home a decade later as the Nazis rose in Europe. Finding his new home in Los Angeles, like many other Jewish refugees—including Stravinsky and Schoenberg—he became a film composer and he won multiple Oscars. The musical language of these songs is rich, dense, dreamy, and powerful—I think you can hear a bit of Korngold's Hollywood future in them. One of my great hopes is to feature vocal warmth and richness in my performances, and these songs offer the perfect chance to showcase those qualities. The following set is a collection of three prayers of sorts, the first two by Black American composers, and the last by Handel, the composer who is most central to my career and whose work speaks perhaps most deeply to me. First is "Prayer" by Leslie Adams, who sadly passed away last year, followed by "Sunset" by Florence Price, both of which share a dreamy quality. And

then we have "O Lord, Whose Mercies Numberless" from Handel's *Saul*, one of his greatest, and most underrated, masterpieces; I first performed *Saul* with the Bay Area's own Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra (I've now been delighted to sing the role around Europe and the US), and I have loved singing it ever since. I first came to singing through prayer, so singing these types of works has always spoken very deeply to me.

Next, we have a set of songs by Johannes Brahms and Clara Schumann, intertwined together just as their own personal and romantic lives were (much to Robert's chagrin!). These three songs take us to beautiful dreams, dark and wondrous, then yearning and restless, and finally to a perfect still night in the garden that soon erupts with ardent desire. When I joined the Young Artist program at Houston Grand Opera, one of the first things they suggested for me was a set of songs by Brahms, and so began my deep exploration of German lieder. The first song I fell deeply in love with was "Unbewegte laue Luft"—on a recording by legendary Bay Area native Lorraine Hunt Lieberson—and it's an honor to lend my own voice to this special song.

To close the first half, we'll present two pieces from my Jewish heritage. I begin with one of the first pieces I sang in synagogue back when I was initially finding my voice. I began singing as a cantor when I was 13 years old, and my favorite piece in the High Holiday service was this powerful setting of the Avinu Malkeinu by Max Janowski in which the cantor pleads with God to rid us of oppression and adversity and inscribe us all in the Book of Life. Following this, we'll hear Ravel's setting of the Kaddish, one of the most central Jewish prayers. Variations of this prayer frame every Jewish service, and one variation of it is the prayer said every day by mourners. Though he wasn't Jewish himself, Ravel truly captured the solemn beauty and sense of holiness of this im-



portant prayer, and I can't think of a more powerful way to conclude the first half of our evening.

I am deeply honored that leading American composer (and another San Franciscan!) Jake Heggie has composed a set of three songs for us to premiere on this tour, set to beautiful poetry by the luminary Margaret Atwood. Jake has written a few words about these songs:

Oh Children is a set of three songs based on nature poetry by the great Canadian writer, Margaret Atwood. The cycle was composed especially for Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen's debut American recital tour, including tonight's performance at Cal Performances, and crafted in response to his love of nature: of being immersed in the natural world—feeling connected and restored by the power and beauty of trees, mountains, ocean, and skies. I, too, have a great passion for being out in nature and felt moved and inspired by Aryeh's enthusiasm, as well as his glorious voice, honesty, and artistry. However, we are at a precarious time on the planet, when much of what we cherish in nature is at risk of vanishing. Margaret offered these three remarkable poems because each contains a warning about the destructive power of human arrogance and interference in the natural world. *Oh Children* was commissioned by the Merola Opera Program and generously underwritten by Bernice Lindstrom, Karen Kubin, and Jennifer Brahm.

To close the program, I am honored to be likely the first countertenor to sing *Liederkreis*, a cycle of 12 songs written by Robert Schumann during his "year of song," when he poured out many great works after finally being able to marry Clara Wieck. The poetry by Eichendorff shares many of the dreamy qualities of the poetry set by Korngold in the set that opened this evening's performance. This cycle is deeply Romantic—Schumann called it his "most Romantic work ever"—and the energy, mystery, and beauty of the forest appears in all but one of the songs. I am someone who finds his own deepest joy and peace during long hikes through the woods—most mornings that I spend here at home begin with a few miles in my favorite park, Redwood Regional. So I have always been drawn towards music that "lives" in this world. The relationship between humanity and nature is the narrative through-line of *Liederkreis*, just as it has been the through-line of this entire program.

It has been an honor to depart into these Romantic works together. After presenting this program around the United States—at such storied venues as Carnegie Hall and the imperiled Kennedy Center—performing this very personal recital here at home is truly a dream come true. I am deeply grateful to you for joining us on this journey!

—Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen (*countertenor*) brings his "astonishingly beautiful," "golden-toned" (*The Guardian*) instrument to a broad range of repertoire spanning the Baroque to the contemporary. Acclaimed as both a "young star" and "complete artist" by the *New York Times* and as "extravagantly gifted... poised to redefine what's possible for singers of this distinctive voice type" by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nussbaum Cohen's

passion for creating performances of great vocal beauty and dramatic intensity have earned him a reputation as "a redefining force in the countertenor field" (*Limelight*).

This season, Nussbaum Cohen makes major title role debuts in Handel's *Rinaldo* on an international concert tour with Harry Bicket leading The English Concert, Handel's *Tolomeo* with Peter Whelan and Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, and Gluck's

Orfeo ed Eurydice with Dame Jane Glover conducting Music of the Baroque. On the opera stage, he makes his Spanish debut in Valencia as Handel's *Giulio Cesare* under the baton of Marc Minkowski, and he returns to Houston Grand Opera in a fully staged presentation of Robert Wilson's mesmerizing vision of the beloved *Messiah*.

Recent seasons have taken him to many of the world's greatest venues and orchestras, including the Metropolitan Opera; Teatro dell'Opera di Roma; the Bayerische Staatsoper (Munich); Opernhaus Zürich; the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; San Francisco Opera, Ballet, and Symphony; Los Angeles Opera; Glyndebourne; Carnegie Hall; the Kennedy Center; La Monnaie de Munt (Brussels); the Salzburger Festspiele; the Adelaide Festival (Australia); Komische Oper Berlin; and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra at the Concertgebouw.

Nussbaum Cohen's first commercial recording—the world premiere of Kenneth Fuchs' *Poems of Life* with the London Symphony Orchestra under JoAnn Falletta—was honored with a Grammy Award for Best Classical Compendium in 2019. His growing recording catalogue includes *Uncharted*, which *BBC Music Magazine* hailed as “excellent... achingly beautiful... Nussbaum Cohen's countertenor is characterized by its richness and warmth, wielded with great technical skill.” Other recordings include Handel's *Jephtha* with Music of the Baroque; Handel's *Saul* with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra; music by Gluck, Handel, and Vivaldi with American Bach Soloists; and releases of Bach's *Easter Oratorio* and *Magnificat* and Bach's *St. John Passion* with the Cantata Collective.

After earning his bachelor's degree in history from Princeton University, Nussbaum Cohen went on to become the first countertenor in the history of the Houston Grand Opera Studio. He is also a proud graduate of San Francisco Opera's Merola and Adler Fellowship Programs.

John Churchwell (*piano*) served as head of music for San Francisco Opera for the past 14 years. Prior to this appointment, he served as an assistant conductor for both the Metropolitan Opera and San Francisco Opera. Churchwell has worked on more than 150 productions with conductors including James Levine, Nicola Luisotti, Donald Runnicles, Nello Santi, and Sir Charles Mackerras. A champion of American music, Churchwell prepared the world premieres of John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby*, Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, Stewart Wallace/Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Philip Glass' *Appomattox*, and Tobias Picker's *Dolores Claiborne*. More recently, he led the preparation for John Adams' world premiere of *The Girls of the Golden West* and the West Coast premiere of Jennifer Higdon's *Cold Mountain*.

Along with his work with Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen, on the recital stage, Churchwell has partnered with some of today's most sought-after vocalists, including appearances at the Hollywood Bowl with Ellie Dehn, at San Francisco Symphony with Michael Fabiano, and in recitals with Renée Fleming, Sasha Cooke, Lawrence Brownlee, Lisette Oropesa, Joyce DiDonato, Susanna Phillips, and Isabel Leonard.

Churchwell spends his summers at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, where he is Co-Director of the Lehrer Vocal Institute. While there, in addition to chamber music performances and public master classes, Churchwell is instrumental in the training of young singers and apprentice coaches.

Churchwell earned his doctorate from the University of Minnesota and holds a bachelor's degree in piano from the New England Conservatory and a bachelor's degree in French from Tufts University. He attended the Merola Opera Program and is a graduate of the Lindemann Young Artists Program at the Metropolitan Opera.