

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE  
Department of Music presents

Susan Narucki, soprano

Kirsten Wiest, coloratura soprano

## **New Music for Two Voices**

**Florence Bayz Music Series**

Dr. Amy Skjerseth, *coordinator*

Wednesday, February 25, 2025

12:00 – 12:50 P.M.

Music Rehearsal Hall, ARTS 157

## PROGRAM

*come sempre* (2025)

Rozalie Hirs  
(b. 1965)

*Melisande* (2022)

- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.
- V.

Marti Epstein  
(b. 1959)

*From the Grammar of Dreams* (1988)

- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.
- V.

Kaija Saariaho  
(1952 – 2023)

## NOTES

**Rozalie Hirs** (b. 1965) is a Dutch composer and poet whose work explores the relationship between music and language. She writes for ensembles, orchestra, and electronics, and her music has been performed by groups such as the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Musikfabrik, and Klangforum Wien, as well as at major European festivals. The author of nine poetry collections, Hirs often integrates text into her compositions. With backgrounds in both music and chemical engineering, she draws on acoustics and perception to shape a distinctive and carefully crafted sound world.

*come sempre* (2025), commissioned by soprano Susan Narucki, sets a poem from Hirs' collection *ecologica*. Written for soprano and coloratura soprano, the work centers on the joy of singing together. Clear melodic lines unfold around shifting tonal centers, creating a transparent harmonic landscape in which the two voices alternate roles, share musical material, and interact as equal partners.

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**Marti Epstein** (b. 1959) is an American composer and Professor of Composition at Berklee College of Music and the Boston Conservatory at Berklee. Her music has been performed by ensembles including the San Francisco Symphony, Ensemble Modern, and the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Frankfurt. In 2020, she received a Guggenheim Fellowship in composition. Known for her expressive and distinctive musical voice, Epstein has received numerous commissions from chamber ensembles, soloists, and festivals in the United States and Europe, and composed the puppet opera *Hero und Leander* for the Munich Biennale.

*Melisande* was composed in 2022 with text by Marti Epstein and Maurice Maeterlinck.

I. Here she is alone on the stage,  
Endowed with reason and will.

This plant world that seems so tranquil, so resigned,  
Where all seems to be acceptance, silence,  
Obedience, reverence is, on the contrary,  
One where the revolt against destiny  
Is at its most vehement and most obstinate.

II. I hear a noise. There is no sound. I hear lights.

It is enough to make the stones weep.  
The human soul is very quiet.  
So quiet, so silent.  
Distant, invisible, motionless.

Scattered by the wind from the shores of the sun,  
Scent of sunlight. You never see clear skies.  
There are innumerable stars.

All of the stars are falling.  
The sun is at the bottom of the sea.  
I drank the light, the space, the dawn.  
This need for movement, this appetite for space.

III. Isn't it surprising that she is able  
To succeed in living outside the time  
Assigned to us by another destiny?  
As she is, in entering another universe  
Freed from the weightiest laws of matter.

I am not of this place.  
I thought I had it in my hands.  
I prefer to walk alone.  
I wish to be seen.  
I am happy. I am sad.  
I do not know what I know.  
Mysterious being,  
Insubordination, courage,  
Perseverance, ingenuity.

Mortally wounded, radiant and free.  
I see a rose in the shadows.  
Marvelous systems of scattering,  
Fragrant with violets,  
Strange grace of the waterlily.

IV. The female flower unfurls the long spiral of its stalk  
Rises, emerges, floats and blossoms  
On the surface of the pond.

How clear the water is.  
I would like to see the bottom of the water.  
I would like to touch the water.  
Plunge both hands in it.

I saw something pass at the bottom of the water.  
It has fallen in the water.  
There is nothing but a great circle on the water.

Would you like a little water?  
Not til the sun is at the bottom of the sea.

Water, still and profound.  
The sea makes it glimmer green.

I see the water tremble above my head.

V. I hear lights,  
Strange reflections:  
A rose in the shadows,  
The evening sunlight in my eyes.  
There is light in deepest darkness.  
She stretches her whole being in one single gesture

To escape above the fatality below,  
To elude and transgress the dark and weighty law,  
To free herself,  
To break the narrow sphere,  
To invent or invoke wings,  
To escape as far as possible,  
To vanquish space where fate encloses her,

To, to, to...  
To approach another realm,  
To enter a moving, animated world.

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**Kaija Saariaho** (1952–2023) was a Finnish composer based in Paris, celebrated for her luminous textures and integration of acoustic and electronic sound. She studied in Helsinki, Freiburg, and at IRCAM in Paris, where her work shifted from serialism to spectralism. Commissioned by major institutions including the BBC, the New York Philharmonic, and the Finnish National Opera, Saariaho was named the greatest living composer in a 2019 BBC Music Magazine poll.

*From the Grammar of Dreams* (1988), is a five-movement duet for two a cappella sopranos on texts by Sylvia Plath. The voices at times embody separate characters, and at others merge into one. Saariaho described the work as a series of dreamlike soundscapes—five contrasting yet interconnected visions exploring the boundary between nightmare and awakening.

I.           It happens. Will it go on?  
              My mind a rock,  
              No fingers to grip, no tongue,  
  
              My god the iron lung  
              That loves me, pumps  
              My Two  
              Dust bags in and out,  
              Will not let me relapse  
              While the day outside glides by like ticker tape.  
              The night brings violets  
              Tapestries of eyes,  
  
              Lights, The soft anonymous  
              Talkers: “You all right?”  
              The starched, inaccessible breast.

A bad dream.  
I remembered everything.

- II. Dead egg, I lie whole  
On a whole world I cannot touch,  
At the white, tight
- Drum of my sleeping couch  
Photographs visit me  
My wife, dead and flat, in 1920 furs,  
Mouth full of pearls,
- Two girls as flat as she, who whisper  
'We're your daughters.'  
The still waters  
Wrap my lips  
Eyes, nose and ears,  
A clear  
Cellophane I cannot crack.  
On my bare back
- I smile, a Buddha, all  
Wants, desire  
Falling from me like rings  
Hugging their lights.
- III. The claw of the magnolia,  
Drunk on its own scents,  
Asks nothing of life.
- IV. I thought I would swim out until I was too  
tired to swim back.  
As I paddled on, my heartbeat boomed like  
a dull motor in my ears.  
I am I am I am. (...)
- I took a deep breath and listened to the old  
brag of my heart.  
I am, I am, I am.
- V. I smile.

I remembered the cadavers and Doreen and the  
story of the fig-tree and Marco's diamond and  
the sailor on the Common and Doctor Gordon's  
wall-eyed nurse and the broken thermometers  
and the negro with his two kinds of beans and  
the twenty pounds I gained on insulin and the  
rock that bulged between the sky and sea like a  
grey skull.

Maybe forgetfulness, like a kind snow, should  
numb and cover them.

But they were part of me. They were my  
Landscape.

## SUSAN NARUCKI

American soprano **Susan Narucki** has forged a unique path; her dedication to the music of our time has led to critically acclaimed performances with musicians of the first rank and close collaborations with generations of composers. She has appeared as a soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Netherlands Opera and numerous appearances at Carnegie Hall. She has commissioned, produced and performed two critically acclaimed chamber operas: *Inheritance* (2018) by Grawemeyer Award winning composer Lei Liang, addressing gun violence in America and *Cuatro Corridos* (2013), based on a true story of human trafficking in the San Diego border region. The operas earned major philanthropic support from the MAP Fund for the Performing Arts, UC MEXUS, Creative Capital Foundation, New Music USA, as well as multiple awards from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Susan's extensive discography includes award-winning recordings on major labels, including a 2019 Grammy nomination for Best Classical Vocal Recording for *The Edge of Silence: Vocal Music of Kurtág* (AVIE). Her most recent recording, Kurtág's *Kafka Fragments*, with violinist Curtis Macomber, was named BBC Music Magazine's Vocal Recording of the Month in August 2025. Susan Narucki serves as Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of California at San Diego.



## KIRSTEN ASHLEY WIEST

Award-winning coloratura soprano **Kirsten Ashley Wiest** is best known for singing the classical music of today. Regularly giving premiere performances of new compositions by living composers, her interpretations can also be heard on premiere recordings released by Centaur Records, Inc., MicroFest Records, Sony Classical, and others. She has performed as soloist with numerous orchestras, chamber groups, and choirs throughout southern California. Kirsten also frequently gives recitals, sings with opera companies, and records for film soundtracks, video games, digital opera experiences, and installations.

Kirsten received her Doctor of Musical Arts degree in 2019 from UC San Diego, studying voice with soprano Susan Narucki. Kirsten currently teaches voice at San Bernardino Valley College and UC Riverside. She serves on the Board of Directors for Arrowhead Arts Association, and is Advisor to the Board for the Southern California Philharmonic.



## **SPECIAL THANKS**

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