David Bowie’s
Blackstar

Ambient Orchestra with Maya Beiser, cello
Evan Ziporyn, conductor

WHEN:
WEDNESDAY,
NOVEMBER 7, 2018
7:30 PM

VENUE:
BING
CONCERT HALL
Program

Blackstar

Blackstar Concerto conceived and adapted for orchestra by Evan Ziporyn

Blackstar
‘Tis a Pity She Was a Whore
Lazarus
Sue (or In a Season of Crime)
Girl Loves Me
Dollar Days
I Can't Give Everything Away

Maya Beiser, solo cellist
Evan Ziporyn, conductor
Dave Cook, sound design

The Ambient Orchestra, feat. musicians from Boston Conservatory at Berklee

The program will be performed without intermission.

David Bowie (1947–2016)

BLACKSTAR
Something happened on the day he
died/spirit rose a metre then
stepped aside/
Somebody else took his place and
bravely cried/I'm a Blackstar, I'm a
Blackstar

‘TIS A PITY SHE WAS A WHORE
Man, she punched me like a dude!

LAZARUS
Look up here, I'm in heaven,
I've got scars that can't be seen
I'm so high it makes my brain whirl
Dropped my cell phone down below

SUE
Ride the train, I'm far from home
In a season of crime none need atone

GIRL LOVES ME
Where the F*ck did Monday go?

DOLLAR DAYS
If I never see the English evergreens
I'm running to/
It's nothing to me, it's nothing to see

I CAN'T GIVE EVERYTHING AWAY
Seeing more and feeling less
Saying no but meaning yes,
This is all I ever meant
That's the message that I sent
David Bowie released *Blackstar* on January 8, 2016; he passed away two days later: in characteristic fashion, he had written and staged his own eulogy! *Blackstar* was his parting gift to the world—dark but luminous, richly textured and deeply moving. It felt mysteriously powerful even in the two days before he died; afterwards, as the world realized what he’d been trying to tell us, the album’s poignancy became overwhelming.

*Blackstar* is a concept album, but the concept itself is unnamed, perhaps because it is the Un-nameable itself, death, how to face it, and how to celebrate life—his and ours—even in its shadow. Unlike Bowie's 2015 musical *Lazarus* (which shares similar concerns and one song) *Blackstar* has no clear story line; unlike many of his earlier albums, there is no single alter ego—no Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane, Major Tom, Thin White Duke. Rather a collection of characters, some of whom may remind us of all of the above, taking us through aspects of their lives, then returning to the deathbed and the final passage. The two videos Bowie made for the album also provide clues with images of hospital beds, death masks, possession, and trance. I am not alone in having come to regard the album as Bowie's personal guide to the ultimate career move, his own personal Book of the Dead.

Bowie spent his life playing with personae, but the character in the first song, the title track *Blackstar*, is beyond anonymous. He is 'somebody else' who 'took his place.' A lot of time is spent telling us who he's not ('I'm not a film star, I'm not a gangster, I'm not a porn star, I'm not a wandering star'), and very little telling us who he is (only the enigmatic 'blackstar'). The 'spirit' who 'rose a metre, then stepped aside' in the first song checks back in with us two songs later, in *Lazarus*. He's 'in heaven,'
or ‘so high It makes my brain whirl,’ or possibly both. In either case, he’s gone, beyond reach, having ‘dropped my cell phone down below.’ These songs alternate with tales from the ‘bardo,’ the point between life and death, where worldly images are retained but gradually slip away. Bowie jump-cuts from the ethereal death-bed scenes of *Blackstar* and *Lazarus* to images from lives fully lived. *Tis Pity* and *Sue* are intense soliloquys of passion and violence, while *Girl Loves Me*’s profane, sing-song refrain (‘where the f*ck did Monday go?’) is couched in the menacing argots of Nadsat, the made-up language of *Clockwork Orange*, and Polari, a London street slang. The final two songs take us back to the point of departure. In *Dollar Days*, the character struggles to let go (‘I’m trying to…I’m dying to…’); in *I Can’t Give Everything Away* he does exactly that, flying away, ‘seeing more and feeling less, saying no but meaning yes, this is all I ever meant, that’s the message that I sent.’

Tonight’s orchestral version is without lyrics (short excerpts are printed on page 2, and full lyrics can be found online), but the words and their meaning—this tale of Death and Transfiguration—are very much in our minds. They hover over the music, even in their absence, much like the ‘spirit’ figure in the first song: gone, but with a trace. We made our *Blackstar* to honor Bowie and his influence, but also to immerse ourselves in this amazing music, to live inside it, explore it, embody it. Also to transform it, in the spirit of Bowie and of the record itself. In making these arrangements, Jamshied Sharifi and I followed Bowie’s breadcrumbs, keeping closely to the paths of the original songs, but never trying to imitate or replicate his original ‘sound and vision.’ As it turns out, Bowie’s music, which so radically transformed the ecosphere of the recording, is vibrant enough to thrive in a very different one, the acoustic and live biome of the orchestra.

Bowie’s 4-octave vocal range matches that of the cello almost exactly; I knew immediately that *Blackstar* would be a cello concerto, with Maya Beiser as soloist. Bowie’s voice is unique and inimitable, and his range was matched by his stylistic breadth. Over his career, from album to album, but also within a single song, sometimes a single phrase, Bowie would shapeshift while always remaining himself. He could be a brooding rocker one moment and an English music hall star the next; he could start a phrase bel canto and end it like a blues man. He could be a jazz crooner, soul stylist, folk singer, sprech-stimmer, and always sound expressive and authentic. Maya Beiser does similar things on the cello: she transforms the instrument with each performance, whether she’s playing Bach, Dvorak, Piazzolla, or Janis Joplin. In *Blackstar* she is vocalist one moment, lead guitarist the next, she evokes Bowie’s spirit while never ceasing to be herself.

—Evan Ziporyn
Maya Beiser
Avant-garde cellist and multifaceted artist Maya Beiser defies categories. She has captivated audiences worldwide with her virtuosity, eclectic repertoire, and relentless quest to redefine her instrument’s boundaries, passionately forging a career path through uncharted territories. Praised by Rolling Stone as a “cello rock star,” she has been hailed by the New York Times for her “stirring emotional power” while the Boston Globe described her as “a force of nature.” Raised in the Galilee Mountains in Israel, surrounded by the music and rituals of Jews, Muslims, and Christians while studying classical cello repertoire, Maya is dedicated to reinventing solo cello performance in the mainstream arena. A featured performer on the world’s most prestigious stages including Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, BAM, Kennedy Center, London’s Southbank Centre, Royal Albert Hall and the Barbican, Sydney Opera House, Beijing Festival, Barcelona’s L’auditori, Paris’ Cité de la Musique, and Stockholm’s Concert Hall, she has collaborated with a wide range of artists including Tan Dun, Brian Eno, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Louis Andriessen, Shirin Neshat, Bill Morrison, Robert Woodruff and Lucinda Childs, among many others. Her discography includes ten solo albums and numerous feature appearances on film and TV soundtracks; her 2016 album TranceClassical debuted at No. 1 on the Apple Music classical chart and her acclaimed album Uncovered also topped the classical music charts making the number one spot on both Amazon and Apple Music. Maya Beiser is a 2015 United States Artists (USA) Distinguished Fellow and a 2017 Mellon Distinguished Visiting Artist at MIT. Her 2011 TED Talk has been watched by over one million people, and she was recently a Presenting Artist at the inaugural CultureSummit in Abu Dhabi. Maya was a founding member of the Bang on a Can All-Stars and is a graduate of Yale University. www.mayabeiser.com

About the Artists
Evan Ziporyn
Composer/arranger Evan Ziporyn's music has taken him from Balinese temples to concert halls around the world. He has composed for and collaborated with Yo-Yo Ma, Brooklyn Rider, Ethel, Anna Sofie Von Otter, the American Composers Orchestra, BMOP, Iva Bittova, Terry Riley, Don Byron, Wu Man, and Bang on a Can. In 2017, his arrangements were featured on Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's The Vietnam War, and on Silkroad's Grammy-winning album Sing Me Home. Recent conducting appearances include LA Opera (Keeril Makan's Persona), Hamburg Elbsphilharmonie (Julia Wolfe/Bill Morrison's Fuel), the Barcelona Symphony, and the Cleveland Museum of Art. At MIT he is Distinguished Professor of Music and Director of the Center for Art, Science and Technology. He studied at Eastman School of Music, Yale, and UC Berkeley with Joseph Schwantner, Martin Bresnick, and Gerard Grisey. He received a Fulbright in 1987, founded Gamelan Galak Tika in 1993, and has composed a series of groundbreaking compositions for gamelan and western instruments, as well as evening-length works such as 2001's ShadowBang, 2004's Oedipus Rex (Robert Woodruff, director), and 2009's A House in Bali, which was featured at BAM Next Wave in October 2010. Awards include a USA Artist Fellowship, the Goddard Lieberson Prize from the American Academy, Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship, and commissions from Carnegie Hall, Kronos Quartet, Rockefeller Multi-Arts Program, and Meet the Composer. From 1992-2012 he served as music director, producer, and arranger for the Bang on a Can Allstars, winning Musical America's Ensemble of the Year award in 2005. He has also recorded with Paul Simon, Christine Southworth, and the Steve Reich Ensemble (sharing in their 1998 Grammy for Best Chamber Music Performance). www.ziporyn.com

Ambient Orchestra
Evan Ziporyn started the Ambient Orchestra in 2016 to create living orchestral versions of great ambient recordings such as those of Fripp, Eno, and Terry Riley. David Bowie’s untimely death impelled him to launch the ensemble with two tributes to this seminal figure. “We wanted to do something now, in the present moment, while our thoughts and feelings about David Bowie and what he represents are still all too present. Brian Eno defined ambient music as ‘an atmosphere, a surrounding influence, a tint…pieces for particular times and situations.’ Ambient also means ‘of or relating to the immediate surroundings.’ The Ambient Orchestra is devoted to both.” In its debut performance on January 29, 2016,
just two and a half weeks after Bowie’s death, the 80-member ensemble performed Philip Glass’s symphonic tributes to Bowie: Symphony No. 1—Low Symphony and Symphony No. 4—Heroes Symphony in a fundraiser for cancer research. The following March, the ensemble reconvened to premiere Blackstar, with Maya Beiser as soloist. This program also featured a new ambient-ized version of Erik Satie’s Gymnopedies and Ziporyn’s own Frog’s Eye. Ziporyn and Beiser have since performed Blackstar with the Barcelona Symphony and with the LPR Ensemble at SummerStage in New York’s Central Park. Tonight’s performance features the touring 26-member Ambient Orchestra, in which our principal soloists are joined by wonderful faculty and students of the Boston Conservatory’s Contemporary Classical Music Program. We are deeply grateful to this visionary institution for the embrace and support of this program. www.ambientorchestra.com

Boston Conservatory at Berklee provides a progressive learning environment where students are challenged to realize their potential as artists and inspired to pursue their dreams. Long recognized for its specialized training in dance, music, and theater, the Conservatory’s merger with Berklee now combines this rigorous, focused instruction with unparalleled access to a broad range of academic and creative opportunities. Set in the cultural, historical, and educational hub of Boston, this extraordinary institution represents the future of performing arts education.

Credits
All compositions by David Bowie, ©RZO Music; Sue by David Bowie, Paul Bateman, Bob Bhamra, Maria Schneider; © Music Sales Corporation, Tintoretto Music

All arrangements by Evan Ziporyn; Lazarus & I Can’t Give Everything Away arranged by Jamshied Sharifi & Evan Ziporyn

Acknowledgments
Alex Rigopulos and Sachi Sato

Boston Conservatory at Berklee
Cathy Young,
Executive Director
Michael Shinn,
Dean of Music
Sarah Brady,
Director of Contemporary Classical Music
Ryan Fossier,
Chief Ensemble Operations Coordinator

MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology
MIT Music & Theater Arts
Blackstar Orchestra Musicians

**Conductor**
Evan Ziporyn

**Solo Cellist**
Maya Beiser

**Flute & Piccolo**
Sarah Brady

**Flute & Alto Flute**
Caroline Shaffer

**Oboe**
Alexis Mitchell

**Oboe & English Horn**
Casey Kearney

**Clarinets**
Shannon Williams

**Clarinets & Bass Clarinet**
David Angelo

**Horns**
Maria D’Ambrosio
Ryan Fossier

**Trumpets**
Jonah Kappraff
Brian Voelz

**Trombone**
Justin Coyne

**Trombone**
Steve Filippone

**Keyboard**
Kevin Madison

**Percussion**
Christopher Gunnell
Willie Winant
Nicholas Stevens

**First Violins**
Gabby Diaz (concertmaster)
Alec Norkey

**Second Violins**
Shaw Pong Liu
Brian Stuligross

**Violas**
Amelia Hollander
Roselyn Hobbs

**Cello**
Leo Eguchi
Brianna Tagliaferro

**Bass**
Gillian Dana
Chris Janson

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**Upcoming Events**

**Tickets and information:**
live.stanford.edu

**Dianne Reeves**
*Christmas Time Is Here*
Dec 14 • 7:30PM
Bing Concert Hall

**New Breed Brass Band**
Jan 19 • 7:00 & 9:00 PM
Bing Studio