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MY LAI MASSACRE INSPIRES NEW CREATION FROM STANFORD COMPOSER JONATHAN BERGER FOR THE KRONOS QUARTET

The premiere at Bing Concert Hall on October 10 launches Stanford Live’s “Live Context” series, exploring the theme War: Return and Recovery

Stanford, CA, September 15, 2015—The massacre of more than 500 innocent civilians by American soldiers in the village of My Lai, on March 19, 1968, was one of the darkest moments of the Vietnam War — one that traumatized the nation and swayed the course of history. The events of that day will be brought to the stage by the Kronos Quartet and collaborators in a new work of the same name by Stanford composer Jonathan Berger and Bay Area novelist Harriet Scott Chessman.

Presented by Stanford Live, in its concert premiere on Saturday, October 10 at Bing Concert Hall, My Lai is an artistic portrayal of and response to the horrific episode.

It approaches the story from the perspective of young army helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson who, by happenstance, witnessed the killing in the course of a routine reconnaissance flight. He attempted to intercede — first by reporting the incident, then by landing his helicopter between a group of civilians and the advancing U.S. troops. Failing to stop the carnage, he pulled a wounded child from his dead mother’s grasp and flew him to safety. Thompson’s refusal to remain silent about the massacre forced the military to conduct an inquiry.

Singer Rinde Eckert will portray Thompson in what the creators call a “monodrama.” Infirm and dying of cancer at a V.A. hospital, he reflects on the war and on decades of being maligned as unpatriotic and traitorous.
For librettist Chessman, Thompson emerged as a “compelling, extraordinary figure. I sought first to listen for his voice,” she says, “and somehow this voice — open, plainspoken, humble, yearning and furious, forthright, baffled, pained and sorrowful — came to me powerfully.”

Berger’s score juxtaposes traditional Vietnamese percussion instruments (played by multi-instrumentalist and singer Vân Ánh Vanessa Võ), many of which are made from spent shell casings, with traditional string quartet, voice and recorded sounds. The result is a multi-layered musical experience.

“My Lai simultaneously represents a continuation of my creative path and an exciting departure into new sound worlds,” says Berger. “As was the case in my recent work The War Reporter (premiered at Bing in 2013), My Lai seeks a mode of expression in which the political and societal underpinnings of conflict, and its senseless brutality, are set through a character study of an individual who unintentionally becomes inextricably bound up in the fray of war.”

LIVE CONTEXT: ART + IDEAS

Dramatizing Thompson’s experience will not only engage audiences in the human story at the center of this particular event. The performance launches a series of events about the challenges of soldiers of soldiers returning from war, which is one of the key themes in Stanford Live’s “Live Context: Art + Ideas.”

Just before the My Lai premiere at 6:30 p.m., veteran journalist Trent Angers — author of The Forgotten Hero of My Lai: The Hugh Thompson Story — will give a preshow talk on U.S. Army helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson. A discussion with the artists immediately follows the performance.

On Nov. 2, Stanford Live hosts a papermaking workshop where uniforms worn in service will be transformed into handmade paper. The workshop, which will take place on the Anderson Collection lawn, is free and open to the public.

Live Context will also explore military experiences in the Middle East, expressed in a performance by the AXIS Dance Company in April. For more information, visit live.stanford.edu/livecontext.

My Lai was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet, Rinde Eckert, and Vân-Ánh Võ by the Harris Theater for Music and Dance and the Laura and Ricardo Rosenkranz Artistic Innovation Fund through the
Imagine Campaign, the Gerbode and Hewlett Foundations’ 2013 Music Commissioning Awards initiative and the National Endowment for the Arts.

TICKET INFORMATION
Tickets for My Lai, presented by Stanford Live on October 10, start at $30 for adults (check website for full pricing) and are $15 for all current Stanford students. Tickets are available at the Bing Concert Hall Ticket Office, by phone at 650-724-2464 (BING) or online at live.stanford.edu.

VENUE INFORMATION
Bing Concert Hall is located on the Stanford University campus at 327 Lasuen Street on the corner of Lasuen and Campus Dr. Parking on campus is free of charge after 4:00 PM and on weekends at all times, and may be found in the Galvez Lot across Campus Drive from Bing Concert Hall. Maps and directions are available at http://live.stanford.edu/Venues/parkingmapsdirections.php.

ABOUT STANFORD LIVE
Stanford Live presents a wide range of the finest performances from around the world fostering a vibrant learning community and providing distinctive experiences through the performing arts. With its home at Bing Concert Hall, Stanford Live is simultaneously a public square, a sanctuary and a lab, drawing on the breadth and depth of Stanford University to connect performance to the significant issues, ideas and discoveries of our time.

CALENDAR EDITORS NOTE:
What: Preshow Talk: Forgotten Hero of My Lai
When: Saturday, October 10, 6:30 p.m.
Where: Bing Concert Hall, 327 Lasuen Street, Stanford University
Tickets: Free
Presented by: Stanford Live
Description: Join veteran journalist Trent Angers, author of *The Forgotten Hero of My Lai: The Hugh Thompson Story*, for a preshow talk on U.S. Army helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson, the American war hero whose intervention in the My Lai Massacre during the Vietnam War is the inspiration for Jonathan Berger’s new work.

What: **Kronos Quartet**

When: Saturday, October 10, 7:30 p.m.

Program: *My Lai* (world premiere, concert version)
A Monodrama for Tenor, String Quartet and Vietnamese Instruments
Jonathan Berger, composer
Harriet Scott Chessman, librettist
Rinde Eckert, Văn-Ánh Vanessa Vô, performers
Brian H. Scott, lighting designer

Where: Bing Concert Hall, 327 Lasuen Street, Stanford University

Tickets: Start at $30 (check live.stanford.edu for full pricing)

Presented by: Stanford Live

Description: The infamous 1968 massacre of Vietnamese villagers by American soldiers at My Lai provides the context for this new work written by Stanford faculty composer Jonathan Berger.

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