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PEAK Performances Programming History

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## Rooms of Light : The Life of Photographs

Office of Arts + Cultural Programming

PEAK Performances at Montclair State University

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# **Peak Performances**

2015 | 2016 SEASON

**World Premiere!**

# *Rooms of Light: The Life of Photographs*

A Song Cycle



October 15–18, 2015  
Alexander Kasser Theater



**MONTCLAIR STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

Photo by Marina Levitskaya

Dr. Susan A. Cole, President  
Daniel Gurskis, Dean, College of the Arts  
Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director, Arts & Cultural Programming

**World Premiere!**

The Builders Association

*Rooms of Light:*  
*The Life of Photographs*  
A Song Cycle

Lyrics by **Mary Jo Salter**

Music composed and orchestrated by **Fred Hersch**

Director **Daniella Topol**

Lighting Designer **Eric Cornwell**

Music Director/Conductor **Gregg Kallor**

Performers **Jonathan Estabrooks, Rebecca Faulkenberry,  
Kathryn Guthrie, Gabrielle Stravelli, Michael Winther**

**The Fred Hersch Ensemble**

**Laura Seaton**, violin

**Lois Martin**, viola

**Jody Redhage**, cello

**Sam Sadigursky**, woodwinds

**Bruce Williamson**, woodwinds

**Matt Aronoff**, bass

**Ross Pederson**, drums/percussion

**Fred Hersch**, piano

Management by **Staci Levine** for **Groundswell Theatricals**.

# **PROGRAM**

- 1. Aperture** (Fred Hersch Ensemble)
- 2. Light Years** (Kathryn)
- 3. Rooms of Light** (Company)
- 4. Outer Space, Deep Blue Sea** (Jonathan)
- 5. Paparazzi** (Kathryn)
- 6. I've Got Your Picture** (Michael, Rebecca)
- 7. Here's Looking at You, Kid** (Gabrielle)
- 8. My Father's Playboy** (Michael)
- 9. Interlude: Landscape** (Instrumental Ensemble)
- 10. Hold Still!** (Company)
- 11. The Medical Waltz** (Kathryn, Michael)
- 12. Hard Evidence** (Rebecca)
- 13. Improvisation: Self-Portrait** (Fred)
- 14. Here I Am** (Gabrielle)
- 15. Selling It** (Company)
- 16. Photoshoppers** (Gabrielle, Jonathan)
- 17. Reflections on a Wedding Album** (Michael)
- 18. Dark Rooms** (Jonathan)
- 19. Roll Call** (Company)

Fred Hersch plays the Steinway Piano.

Produced by and score commissioned by  
Peak Performances @ Montclair State University.

Generous additional funding provided by Linda & Stuart Nelson and  
Florette Hoffheimer.

Duration: 70 minutes, no intermission.

In consideration of both audience and performers, please turn off all electronic devices. The taking of photographs or videos and the use of recording equipment are not permitted. No food or drink is permitted in the theater.

## Program Notes

At the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, NH, one snowy January early in the new millennium, Fred found himself writing music and Mary Jo found herself writing poems—our usual thing. New friends, both of us were veterans of artists' colonies, and MacDowell had worked magically for each of us before. Fred was now writing his song cycle based on Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and talked about the daunting process of turning a revolutionary epic poem of the 19th century from snippets of poems on his studio floor into an extended composition for two jazz singers and an instrumental octet. Mary Jo talked about what it was like to be co-editing the 2,000-page *Norton Anthology of Poetry*, which was competing for her creative time.

We bonded over many suppers with fellow artists and chats by the fireplace. A year or so later, Fred wrote with a question. He'd been commissioned to write a duet for a soprano and baritone—in a hurry. Surely Mary Jo would know some old poem in the public domain (that is, free) he could use? Mary Jo sat down immediately to write the lyric herself. She called it "I've Got Your Picture" and imagined two ex-lovers who were left with only one photograph of the other. Fred wrote the music right away; a composer-lyricist team was born.

And then we got to talking: what if we wrote more songs about photographs—an evening's worth of them? Was there anything more emblematic of our time than photography? We wrote a song about a starlet being hounded by paparazzi; about a widower who couldn't bear to look at his wedding album; about a middle-aged woman fixated on pictures of herself in Europe at age 22; about photos of places most of us will never go, like outer space and the bottom of the deep blue sea. We often collaborated

by phone and email, since we live about 200 miles from each other. Later, we went back to MacDowell together. We wrote about the classic photographs the world shares: the flag-raising at Iwo Jima, John and Yoko naked, Marilyn Monroe. And then, after a few of the songs were performed at Lincoln Center, we put aside the project.

In 2013, we started again. A lot had happened in the world to make photography even more central: the rise of online dating sites, of the tweet, the iPhone, the selfie; a ban had finally been lifted on taking photographs of soldiers' coffins returning home from the Middle East. We were consuming photography, and photography was consuming us. Our lives were validated somehow by photographs, each one of them a "room of light." So our song cycle concluded—although the implications of photography will never be finished.

Fred has found a congenial home for his large compositional projects at the Alexander Kasser Theater. In 2011, Peak Performances commissioned the jazz/theater/multimedia work *My Coma Dreams*. They came on board with enthusiasm to help realize *Rooms of Light* with the immensely talented director Daniella Topol. We hope you enjoy our songs.

—Mary Jo Salter and Fred Hersch

## Acknowledgments

Many thanks to everyone at The MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, NH; Tim Hurley; Marie LeClaire; Yao Lu; Mark Hardy; Peter Kienle; David Schweizer; Eddy Malave; Matt Stern; and especially to Florette Hoffheimer and Linda and Stuart Nelson for their heartfelt support of this project.

# About the Artists

**Mary Jo Salter** (Lyrics) is the author of eight books of poetry. Her most recent are *Nothing by Design* (2013) and *A Phone Call to the Future: Selected Poems* (2008), published in the United States by Alfred A. Knopf. *It's Hard to Say* (2015) was published in England by Waywiser Press. Salter has also been a co-editor of *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* since 1996. An essayist and lecturer, she is also author of a children's book (*The Moon Comes Home*) and a playwright (*Falling Bodies*). She has worked with Fred Hersch, as lyricist for his music, for more than a dozen years. Among her awards are Guggenheim, Rockefeller, and Bogliasco fellowships. A graduate of Harvard and of the University of Cambridge, she holds an honorary doctor of letters from Amherst College, and in 2014 she was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She lives in Baltimore, where she is Krieger-Eisenhower Professor and co-chair of The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University.

**Fred Hersch** (Composer/Orchestrator), as a solo pianist, composer, bandleader, and theatrical conceptualist, lives up to the praise of the *New York Times*, who, in a featured Sunday Magazine piece, aptly declared him “singular among the trailblazers of their art, a largely unsung innovator of this borderless, individualistic jazz—a jazz for the 21st century.” He has released three dozen recordings as a leader/co-leader; holds numerous awards, including a 2003 Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship; and was named Jazz Pianist of the Year 2011 by the Jazz Journalists Association. He is also the first artist in the 75-year history of New York's legendary Village Vanguard to play weeklong engagements as a solo pianist. He has received eight Grammy nominations as pianist and composer (two in 2012 for his historic *Alone at the Vanguard*). Hersch is among the most admired of contemporary jazz musicians, having collaborated with an astonishing range of instrumentalists and vocalists throughout worlds of jazz (Joe Henderson, Charlie Haden, Art Farmer, Stan Getz, and Bill Frisell), classical (Renée Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, Christopher O'Riley), and Broadway (Audra McDonald). He has been dubbed by *Vanity Fair* magazine as “the most

arrestingly innovative pianist in jazz over the last decade or so” and he has been an obvious influence on a new generation of pianists. The leader of a celebrated trio whose *Floating* received two 2014 Grammy nominations, he also placed as #3 Jazz Pianist in the 2015 *Downbeat* Critics Poll. In 2011, Hersch mounted the ambitious production *My Coma Dreams*, a critically acclaimed full-evening multimedia work now available on DVD. His newest release, *Fred Hersch SOLO*, has received rave reviews: *All About Jazz* says, “When it comes to the art of solo piano in jazz, there are currently two classes of performers: Fred Hersch and everybody else.” fredhersch.com

**Daniella Topol** (Director) has Off-Broadway credits including Cori Thomas’s *When January Feels Like Summer* (Ensemble Studio Theatre/ Page 73/Women’s Project Theater; *New York Times* Critics’ Pick), Jessica Dickey’s *Charles Ives Take Me Home* (Rattlestick) and *Row after Row* (Women’s Project), Judith Thompson’s *Palace of the End* (Epic Theater Ensemble), Sheila Callaghan’s *Dead City* (New Georges) and *Lascivious Something* (Women’s Project), and Lloyd Suh’s *Jesus in India* (Ma-Yi and Magic). Regional credits include Martyna Majok’s *Ironbound* (Steppenwolf First Look), Rachel Bonds’s *Five Mile Lake* (South Coast Rep), Rajiv Joseph’s *The Monster at the Door* (Alley Theatre), Catherine Treischmann’s *How the World Began* (South Coast Rep and Women’s Project), Tony Meneses’s *Guadalupe in the Guest Room* (Two River Theater), and Niko Tsakalakos and Janet Allard’s *Pool Boy* (Barrington Stage). Topol was the artistic program director of the Lark Play Development Center and New Works program director of the National Alliance for Musical Theatre. She has developed new plays and musicals for a number of organizations, including Manhattan Theatre Club, New York Theatre Workshop, O’Neill Theater Conference, Playwrights Horizons, the Public Theater, and Roundabout Theatre. She has been a grants review panelist for the McKnight Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, has taught for a number of universities including New York University’s Graduate Musical Theatre Writing program, and is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon.

**Eric Cornwell** (Lighting Designer) spent his college years studying film



and photography because it was the nearest option to a major in lighting design, which Harvard did not offer. Thus *Rooms of Light* closes a decades-long circle that has seen Cornwell's designs on stages from Broadway to London, Paris, Sydney, Tokyo, Beijing, and a hundred cities between. Along the way he has worked with artists such as Lucinda Childs, Robert Wilson, Erick Hawkins, Mandy Patinkin, and John Lithgow and with institutions including the Brooklyn Academy of Music, La MaMa, the Public Theater, the Joffrey Ballet, the John F. Kennedy Center, New York City Opera, and the Metropolitan Opera. He received a Maharam Award nomination for work with Mabou Mines. He now balances designing lighting with developing lighting control software and still enjoys taking photographs whenever he can.

**Gregg Kallor** (Music Director/Conductor) is a composer and pianist whose music fuses the traditions he loves into a new, deeply personal language. The *New York Times* wrote, "At home in both jazz and classical forms, [Kallor] writes music of unaffected emotional directness. Leavened with flashes of oddball humor, his works succeed in drawing in the listener—not as consumer or worshipful celebrant, but in a spirit of easygoing camaraderie." He is the inaugural composer-in-residence at SubCulture in New York City; the first season of his residency featured world premieres of three new pieces and collaborations with cellist Joshua Roman, violinist Miranda Cuckson, mezzo-soprano Adriana Zabala, and baritone Matthew Worth. Kallor joined an all-star roster of musicians, including Joyce DiDonato, Yo-Yo Ma, Anthony McGill, and many more, for the CD *An AIDS Quilt Songbook: Sing for Hope*. Kallor's solo recording, *A Single Noon*, is a musical tableau of life in New York City; he premiered *A Single Noon* at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall in 2011. His previous album, *Exhilaration—Dickinson and Yeats Songs*, features his song-settings of poems by Emily Dickinson, William Butler Yeats, and Christina Rossetti sung by mezzo-soprano Adriana Zabala. [greggkallor.com](http://greggkallor.com)

**Jonathan Estabrooks** (Performer) has been hailed by the *New York Times* as a "robust baritone." His rich and versatile timbre and classical and pop roots have led to extensive experience in classical, musical theater, and crossover repertoire. He has performed with major orchestras

and opera companies around the world, notably the Toronto Symphony, Seattle Symphony, and Vancouver Symphony orchestras with Steven Reineke; the National Arts Center Orchestra under Pinchas Zukerman; and the Israeli Chamber Orchestra with Paul Nadler. He released a classical crossover album, *These Miles*, with the Macedonian Radio Orchestra. Notable highlights include appearances at Carnegie Hall–Stern Auditorium (Blizzard Voices), the Kennedy Center, Lyric Opera Virginia (*Broadway and Beyond*), the Baron with Opera Lyra Ottawa (*La Traviata*), creating the role of Alan Turing with American Lyric Theater, and guest appearances at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts. Estabrooks holds a master of music from the Juilliard School and a bachelor of music from the University of Toronto.

**Rebecca Faulkenberry** (Performer), a native of Bermuda, has been seen on Broadway in *Spider-man Turn Off the Dark* (Mary Jane) and *Rock of Ages* (Sherrie); also in the West End at the Royal Court and the Hammersmith Apollo. Other shows include *Rock of Ages* (1st National Tour); *The Shape of Things*; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; *The Royal Family*; and *Cabaret*. She has performed solo concerts or as a featured vocalist at the Rainbow Room, Feinstein's, the Bermuda Festival, 54 Below, and Birdland.

**Kathryn Guthrie** (Performer) is praised for her sharp-witted interpretations of contemporary classical and music theater works. After debuting at New York City Opera in 2012 as Marie in folk-pop star Rufus Wainwright's *Prima Donna*, Guthrie has traveled the world promoting the opera and appears on the cast recording of the opera with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, to be released later in 2015. A champion of new music, Guthrie enjoyed other performances with New York City Opera, including the VOX concert series and Unsuk Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* as the Cheshire Cat. She appears on several recordings with The Shakespeare Concerts on Navona Records, about which *American Record Guide* said her performances "are the high points of this program" and her "singing was radiant." Guthrie has traveled the country, including for appearances with both the Philly Pops and the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. She was a winner of Astral Artists' 2012 National Auditions, was a member of Glimmerglass Opera's Young Artists

Program, and holds a master of music from the Peabody Conservatory, where she received the Phyllis Bryn-Julson Award for Contemporary Music, and a bachelor of music from the University of Connecticut.  
kathrynguthriesoprano.com

**Gabrielle Stravelli** (Performer) has toured the United States with Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra's *Abyssinian: A Gospel Celebration*. She has been featured in the 92nd Street Y's Lyrics & Lyricists series, at the Caramoor Festival, and with the Nelson Riddle Orchestra, Cincinnati Pops, New Jersey Festival Orchestra, and Kentucky Symphony and regularly appears at Birdland as a featured vocalist. As an actress, she has collaborated with award-winning composers and lyricists, including 1999 Tony Award winner Warren Leight and 2012 Richard Rodgers Award winners Matt Gould and Griffin Matthews. Stravelli was one of only ten international vocalists in the 2011 Montreux Jazz Festival Vocal Competition and was first runner-up at the 2009 Jazzmobile Vocal Competition in New York City. She holds a BFA from the University of Cincinnati College–Conservatory of Music. [gabriellestravelli.com](http://gabriellestravelli.com)

**Michael Winther** (Performer) has appeared on Broadway in *33 Variations*, *Mamma Mia!*, *1776*, *Artist Descending a Staircase*, *The Crucible*, and *Damn Yankees*. He received Drama Desk and Drama League nominations for *Songs from an Unmade Bed* (New York Theatre Workshop). Recent credits include *Next to Normal* (Baltimore/Centerstage), *When We Met* (Cap21), *The Laramie Project Cycle* (Brooklyn Academy of Music/Harvey), Fred Hersch and Herschel Garfein's *My Coma Dreams* (Montclair, New York City, Berlin, San Francisco), and *Merrily We Roll Along* (Encores!). He has performed in regional theaters including Ahmanson/Center Theatre Group, Old Globe, Goodspeed, La Jolla, Guthrie, Berkeley Rep, Yale Rep, McCarter, Theatreworks/Palo Alto, Weston, George Street, Ford's, O'Neill Center, Sundance Lab, New York Stage & Film, and Perseverance. Concert appearances include Lincoln Center's American Songbook, Merkin Hall, Town Hall, 54 Below, Joe's Pub, Birdland, Metropolitan Room, and Ars Nova. Film and TV appearances include *Boardwalk Empire*, *Hostages*, *The Avengers*, *Jumper*, *The Break-Up*, *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, *Leverage*, and *Law & Order*. He is a graduate of Williams College.

**Groundswell Theatricals** is a New York City–based company that produces and manages intimate theatrical and concert productions. Founded by Staci Levine, Groundswell has been represented on Broadway and across North America, London’s West End, Australia, and New Zealand. In addition to *Rooms of Light*, other productions include *The Last Two People on Earth: An Apocalyptic Vaudeville*, starring Mandy Patinkin and Taylor Mac, with direction and choreography by Susan Stroman; John Lithgow’s one-man show *Stories by Heart; An Evening with Patti LuPone and Mandy Patinkin*; *Curvy Widow*, a new musical by Bobby Goldman and Drew Brody; *I See You Made an Effort*, the one-woman show by *New York Times* best-selling author Annabelle Gurwitch; and a new touring production of *Sondheim on Sondheim*, created and directed by James Lapine. Prior to founding Groundswell, Levine cut her teeth in commercial theater with the Dodgers, where she worked on numerous Broadway, Off-Broadway, and touring productions including *Titanic*, *Footloose*, *The Music Man*, *42nd Street*, *Wrong Mountain*, *Into the Woods*, *Urinetown*, and *Good Vibrations* as a member of Dodger Management Group. [groundswelltheatricals.com](http://groundswelltheatricals.com)

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**Office of Arts & Cultural Programming** (ACP) presents and produces remarkable works of dance, music, theater, and opera at the Alexander Kasser Theater under the banner Peak Performances. Specific to its mission is a willingness to offer work by artists whose ideas are singular and worthy examples of creative innovation. Notable past productions include Richard Schechner's *Imagining O*; Robert Woodruff's *Dog Days* by David T. Little and Royce Vavrek; Robert Wilson's *Zinnias: The Life of Clementine Hunter* by Bernice Johnson Reagon, Toshi Reagon, and Jacqueline Woodson; David Gordon's *Shlemiel the First* by Robert Brustein, Arnold Weinstein, and Hankus Netsky; Ridge Theater's *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* by David Lang; and The Builders Association's *Elements of Oz*. ACP has commissioned works by Vijay Iyer, Liz Gerring, Bill T. Jones, Susan Marshall, Jan Fabre, Richard Alston, Liz Lerman, Wayne McGregor, Laurie Anderson (for the Kronos Quartet),

Romeo Castellucci, Pat Graney, Fred Hersch, and Nora Chipaumire. ACP has fostered several unique initiatives, such as the Creative Thinking course, which takes the artistic process as impetus for problem solving in all academic disciplines, and Dance for Film on Location at MSU, a multiyear project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

ACP is the proud recipient of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance/New Jersey State Council on the Arts Cultural Access Network Innovator Award and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts Citation of Excellence and Designation of Major Impact.

Piano provided by Steinway and Sons



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**Programs in this season are made possible in part by funds from:**

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Dept. of State,  
a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts

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