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John J. Cali School of Music Immersive
Residency Program

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Roomful of Teeth

John J. Cali School of Music

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Residency Concert:
Roomful of Teeth

Leshowitz Recital Hall
Tuesday, April 5th, 2022
7:30 pm

Cali

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PROGRAM

Montmartre (2009)

Montmartre was written at Mass MoCA in the summer of 2009, during the first-ever assemblage of Roomful of Teeth. I came up for the second week of their 2-week residency, not knowing what the group was capable of doing — a forgivable sin since the group itself was just beginning to learn their own abilities and capacities. With me, I brought some sketches that I felt could be adapted to whatever sounds I heard the singers produce; these were études of sorts, studies in rhythm and harmony that left a lot of room for different sounds in different places. Once I heard what the group was able to do, I adapted some of these with their varied techniques in mind, creating fully-formed pieces that combined my sketches with the sounds of the ensemble. Montmartre is an exploration of sound and color, opening with a counterpoint between throat-singing men and yodeling women, then moving on through a variety of more familiar vocal production techniques, belted and bell-like. I named the work after the famous Paris neighborhood because it's where the concepts of sound and timbre were finally elevated to their rightful place alongside harmony, counterpoint, and voice leading in the Western classical tradition. French composers in the early 20th century wrote pieces that were open to sounds they heard from around the world; now, Roomful of Teeth is doing the same kind of exploration with the human voice.

-JG

Program

Partita for 8 Voices

Caroline Shaw
(b. 1982)

Intermission

Vesper Sparrow

Missy Mazzoli
(b. 1980)

Render

Brad Wells

Bits Torn From Words

Peter Shin
(b. 1991)

IV: I'm happy (reprise)

Run Away

Judd Greenstein
(b. 1979)

Montmartre

Judd Greenstein
(b. 1979)

Partita for 8 Voices

Composed over three summers from 2009-2011, in collaboration with Roomful of Teeth during their residencies at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), Caroline Shaw's *Partita for 8 Voices* was nominated for a Grammy for Best Contemporary Classical Composition and received the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Music. It is the only Pulitzer awarded to an a cappella vocal work, and Shaw, a singer in the ensemble, is the youngest composer ever to have received the prize.

The score's inscription reads: *Partita* is a simple piece. Born of a love of surface and structure, of the human voice, of dancing and tired ligaments, of music, and of our basic desire to draw a line from one point to another. Each movement takes a cue from the traditional baroque suite in initial meter and tone, but the familiar historic framework is soon stretched and broken, through "speech, whispers, sighs, murmurs, wordless melodies and novel vocal effects" (Pulitzer jury citation). Roomful of Teeth's utterly unique approach to singing and vocal timbre originally helped to inspire and shape the work during its creation, and the ensemble continues to refine and reconsider the colors and small details with every performance. *Allemande* opens with the organized chaos of square dance calls overlapping with technical wall drawing directions of the artist Sol LeWitt, suddenly congealing into a bright, angular tune that never keeps its feet on the ground for very long. There are allusions to the movement's intended simulation of motion and of space in the short phrases of text throughout, which are sometimes sung and sometimes embedded as spoken texture. *Sarabande*'s quiet restraint in the beginning is punctured in the middle by an ecstatic, belted melody that resolves quietly at the end, followed soon after by the Inuit-inspired hocketed breaths of *Courante*. A wordless quotation of the American folk hymn "Shining Shore" appears at first as a musical non sequitur but later recombines with the rhythmic breaths as this longest movement is propelled to its final gasp. *Passacaglia* is a set of variations on a repeated chord progression, first experimenting simply with vowel timbre, then expanding into a fuller texture with the return of the Sol LeWitt text. At *Passacaglia*'s premiere in 2009, there was spontaneous applause and cheering at the explosive return of the D-major chord near the end — so just letting you know, feel free to holler or clap any time if you feel like it.

Of the premiere of Shaw's *Partita*, *New York* magazine wrote: "She has discovered a lode of the rarest commodity in contemporary music: joy." And it is with joy that this piece is meant to be received in years to come.

Vesper Sparrow (2012)

Vesper Sparrow was written for Roomful of Teeth at their 2012 residency at Mass MoCA. The text comes from Farnoosh Fathi's poem *Home State*, from her recent book *Great Guns*. The piece is an eclectic amalgamation of imaginary birdsong and my own interpretation of Sardinian overtone singing. In this piece I tried to capture the exuberance and energy of these individual singers as well as a bit of the magic that is created when this group comes together.

-MM

Libretto

What will come so soon
To my golden door
When asleep from all sides
Asleep in the glass pajamas of man

Render (2012)

Written in a cottage in northern Vermont, *Render* is a song inspired by David Eagleman's short story *Search*. The story describes a vision of the afterlife as both the periodic unraveling of our material, molecular structure into other forms in nature and the complete continuity and maintenance — in spite of the unraveling — of our consciousness and feeling.

-BW