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## My Coma Dreams

Office of Arts + Cultural Programming

PEAK Performances at Montclair State University

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## PROGRAM NOTES

The dreams that are the focus of this piece were retained by me for quite some time after I emerged from my two-month coma in early August 2008. Though I had been hospitalized for AIDS-related dementia earlier that year, the pneumonia that caused the coma was a virulent yet common variety—not *pneumocystis carinii*, an opportunistic infection associated with HIV. I rarely remember dreams, so the fact that I retained these so vividly and for so long was notable in itself. After I recovered my motor skills and was well enough to write them down, I lived with the dreams with the idea of doing a musical work based on them. But I wanted the listener to know the story of each dream without reading them in a program or simply seeing them animated on a screen—that would have reduced the music to silent-movie accompaniment. When I showed them to Herschel, he immediately saw the possibilities of a multimedia work with an innovative narrative. I am fortunate in having extraordinary collaborators on this project—and am grateful to be here to share these dreams and the resulting music with you.

—Fred Hersch

When Fred first approached me with these dreams, he was seeking no more than a little organizing help. His idea was to build an instrumental suite around his dreams, perhaps with one of them made into a song, and he sought my advice on order, and so on. But when he showed me the dreams themselves (which he had written down in a few concise, lucid paragraphs), I was drawn to them in a way that still surprises me. I immediately felt that there was a bigger piece inherent in them, a piece that could preserve all their fascinating ambiguity, that could contain their unexpected blend of the highly specific and the universal. Most importantly, I felt there could be a work that might draw the listener deep into the imaginative musical worlds I knew Fred would create.

My search for that bigger piece quickly led me to interview Fred's partner, Scott Morgan, and his doctor, Michael Ligouri (both of whom I must thank for their generosity and patience), and our interviews kept putting me in mind of the vast gulf between their experiences of Fred's coma and his own experiences while in coma. An appreciation of that unbridgeable gulf has resulted in *My Coma Dreams*.

Say "dream" and a natural first response is "what does it mean?"—but this is one question that Fred and I never asked each other. It was important to us to stay true to that initial concept for an instrumental suite: the music is the dreams; the music will answer.

—Herschel Garfein

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Fred Hersch** (Composer/Pianist) has been called "a master who plays it his way" by *The New York Times* and has earned a place among the foremost jazz artists in the world today. He is widely recognized for his ability to steadfastly create a unique body of original works while reinventing the standard jazz repertoire—investing time-tested classics with keen insight, fresh ideas, and extraordinary technique. Hersch's numerous accomplishments include a 2003 Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship for composition and three Grammy nominations. His last work for The Fred Hersch Ensemble, *Leaves of Grass*, was a setting of poetry by Walt Whitman for two voices and mixed ensemble. The work toured extensively to great critical acclaim—including a sellout performance at Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall. Hersch has appeared on over 100 recordings, including more than two dozen albums as bandleader/solo pianist. He has just released *Alone at the Vanguard* (Palmetto), a solo date live from the legendary club. [www.fredhersch.com](http://www.fredhersch.com)

**Herschel Garfein** (Writer/Director) is active as a composer, librettist, and stage director. Currently he is composer and librettist of the operatic adaptation of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, directed in workshop by Mark Morris (American Opera Projects). Garfein wrote the celebrated libretto for Robert Aldridge's opera *Elmer Gantry*, which premiered in 2008 at Nashville Opera and at Peak Performances to critical acclaim ("Behold! An Operatic Miracle"—*New York Times*). A recording will be released this year on the Naxos label. As librettist, Garfein's credits include Aldridge's *Parables* and Robert S. Cohen's *Alzheimer's Stories* and *Edison Invents*. Directing credits include *Edison Invents*, *Gantry* workshops, and Ullmann's *The Emperor of Atlantis*. Garfein was composer/librettist for *Mythologies* (Mark Morris), *Sueños* (Mabou Mines), and *American Steel* (Alabama Symphony) and composed incidental music for Sir Peter Hall's *Troilus and Cressida* (TFNA). In November 2009 *TimeOut New York* wrote: "Garfein has all the makings of a post-millennial Carlisle Floyd... [His] themes are deeply American and rooted in the social mores of Gens X and Y." He teaches music composition and lectures in script analysis at The Steinhardt School, New York University.

**Sarah Wickliffe** (Animation and Graphic Design) is a visual artist, animator, and graphic designer currently living in New York City. She is the only daughter of jazz vocalist Roseanna Vitro and recording engineer Paul Wickliffe and has been painting since she could hold a brush. Wickliffe studied art at Pratt Institute, then transferred to NYU Tisch School of Film and TV where she expanded her skill set to animation. Her thesis film, *Arts Desire*, was the recipient of NYU's Richard Protovin Award and the Gold Student Academy Award for Animation and was screened at many festivals. She graduated NYU at the top of her class in 2006 and has been working in the New York animation industry ever since. Most recently she has worked as a motion graphics artist for The Onion News

Network. She has also worked as a director, storyboard artist, and lead animator for children's television. [www.wickpix.com](http://www.wickpix.com)

**Eamonn Farrell** (Video Systems Design) is a director and video designer based in New York. He has worked extensively with Lee Breuer and Mabou Mines as an assistant director and video designer. He has also worked as a designer or projectionist for Robert Wilson, The Wooster Group, Robert Woodruff, Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Classic Stage Company, the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis, and the Herodion Theater and the Megaron in Athens, Greece. Farrell's own multimedia theater company, Anonymous Ensemble, has presented work in the UK, Germany, Australia, Norway, Greece, and New York City. AnEn's upcoming project is a multimedia opera based on the life of Alan Turing, to be presented by the National Opera of Greece in Athens in June 2011. [www.anonymousemsemble.org](http://www.anonymousemsemble.org)

**Aaron Copp** (Lighting Design) has designed tours for Natalie Merchant, Yo-Yo Ma, Philip Glass, and Laurie Anderson; Mike Birbiglia's *My Girlfriend's Boyfriend* at the Barrow Street Theatre; *Imaginary Cities* for Sō Percussion at BAM; two new works for choreographer Jonah Bokaer in the UK and France; *The Cocktail Party* and *Bedroom Farce* for TACT at Theatre Row; and many other projects. He has been given two NY Dance and Performance Awards (Bessies), one for *The Invention of Minus One* by Jonah Bokaer and one for *Biped* by Merce Cunningham. He was also awarded a San Diego Theater Critics Award for *Bus Stop*, directed by Joe Hardy at the Globe. Copp has an MFA from Yale and a BA from SUNY-Binghamton.

**Michael Winther** (Speaker/Singer) has performed on Broadway in *33 Variations*, *Mamma Mia*, *The Crucible*, *1776*, *Artist Descending a Staircase*, and *Damn Yankees*. Off-Broadway credits include *Songs from an Unmade Bed* (New York Theatre Workshop; Drama Desk nomination),

*Radiant Baby* (NYSF/Public), and *Hapgood* (LCT). Recent regional credits include *Plaid Tidings* (Old Globe), *Band Geeks!* (Goodspeed), *Grey Gardens* (TheatreWorks/Palo Alto), *Most Wanted* (La Jolla Playhouse), *Falsettos* (George Street), *The Boys from Syracuse* (Baltimore Centerstage), and *The People's Temple* (Guthrie/Perseverance). Other regional credits include Yale Rep, McCarter Theatre, Barrington Stage, Syracuse Stage, Ford's Theatre, Pasadena Playhouse, Sundance Theatre Lab, and New York Stage and Film. Winther's recent concert appearances include *The Songs of Fred Hersch*, *Hear & Now!* (Lincoln Center's American Songbook); *What Makes It Great?* with Rob Kapilow (Lincoln Center, Cerritos Center); *The Songs of James Taylor* (Merkin Hall); *New Love Songs* (Metropolitan Room); *New Voices* (Symphony Space); and *Broadway Cabaret Series* and *Broadway by the Year* (Town Hall). He has appeared in film and on TV in *Leverage*, *Meet Dave*, *Jumper*, *The Break Up*, *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, and *Law & Order*. Winther is a graduate of Williams College.

**Gregg Kallor** (Conductor) made his New York concert debut as pianist and composer in Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall in March 2007, presented by the Abby Whiteside Foundation. Harris Goldsmith wrote: "It took but a few impeccably shaped phrases to make it plain that Kallor is a formidably well-trained technician and a master of stylish proportion as well... This superb recital debut truly established a new, important

voice in our musical annals." Kallor's most recent Carnegie Hall concert, in April 2011, featured the world premiere of his new composition, *A Single Noon*—a nine-movement suite for solo piano that combines classical and jazz influences and improvisation. Kallor also played music by Béla Bartók, Annie Clark (St. Vincent), Chick Corea, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Igor Stravinsky, and Louise Talma. Kallor's next album, scheduled for release in late 2011, will feature *A Single Noon* and a mix of classical and jazz pieces. [GreggKallor.com](http://GreggKallor.com)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Dr. Susan A. Cole, President  
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 Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director, Arts & Cultural Programming

Peak Performances @ Montclair presents:

World Premiere!  
**My Coma Dreams**

Music by **Fred Hersch**  
 Written and Directed by **Herschel Garfein**  
 Animation and Graphic Design by **Sarah Wickliffe**  
 Video Systems Design by **Eamonn Farrell**  
 Lighting Design by **Aaron Copp**

Speaker/Singer **Michael Winther** (Fred, Scott, and others)

**The Fred Hersch Ensemble**  
**Ralph Alessi**, trumpet/flugelhorn  
**Mike Christianson**, trombone  
**Steven Lugerner**, oboe, clarinet, alto sax, bass clarinet  
**Adam Kolker**, flute, clarinet, tenor sax  
**Joyce Hammann**, violin  
**Laura Seaton**, violin  
**Ron Lawrence**, viola  
**Dave Eggar**, cello  
**John Hébert**, bass  
**John Hollenbeck**, drums/percussion

**Fred Hersch**, piano  
**Gregg Kallor**, conductor

*My Coma Dreams* is dedicated, with love, to Scott Morgan.

Commissioned by Peak Performances @ Montclair State (NJ), funded with the generous support of Linda and Stuart Nelson through Premiere Commission, Inc., in honor of Fred Hersch.

Supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Piano by Steinway & Sons



Fred Hersch appears by arrangement with Robert Rund Creative Consulting (R2C2), Lambertville, New Jersey.

Duration: 1 hour 15 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 inside the theater.

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Credit: David Bartoloni

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**May 7 and 8, 2011**  
**Alexander Kasser Theater**  
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