

Newcomb Department
MUSIC *of*

FALLING

MAXIM SAMAROV, *composer*

DERBY BELSER, *poet*

MONDAY, MAY 3, 2021

6:00 PM & 7:00 PM

WEINMANN PATIO THEATER - DIXON ANNEX



Tulane
University

SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

FALLING

Text by Derby Belser

I.

I forgot that eyes could share so much
I forgot that I'd ever be curious about another's
touch
I have forgotten how love starts.

If only everyone in this room knew
It was just me and you.

I see you, and I think I see God.
I see you, and I know that I've known you
before—
Regardless of our past lives' lot,
I see you, and I know
in this life, you will be mine.

II.

Intertwining proved easy,
every single line seemed to align
just as soon as you became mine,
and I, yours,

I, yours,
and I am yours
my mind is yours—filled with nothing but you,
my body is yours—wanting nothing but you,
and, intertwined,
love proves easy.

III.

We grow without edges,
and suddenly I know what it means
to want to be one's everything.
Am I losing myself in you?

Branches slightly unsteady,
I bow down,
a newly submissive queen,
surrendering to hold your legacy.

Yet—
My hesitation disappears
when I meet
this new being
that is both you and me—
she has your eyes, and I fall all over again.

IV.

I inhale at the shock of rain:

A laugh a bit too dissonant
A smile a bit too forced
A hold a bit too tight

And exhale, just the same
Awaiting the rainbow's arrival.

V.

My love, something's wavering
and I fear I can no longer
regain my balance.

Something is no longer right,
you bring shadows
only you can invite,
out of both of us.

What do you do when your love is a liar?
promises coming undone, and your undoing
is doing a number on me.

VI.

You are two people
One knows kindness and softness
and the gentle turning of pages
of a book I wish I still had.

One knows silence—
Mine, as he speaks in capital letters,
crowding our space with everything about me
that he hates.

He wages riots when I forget to read his mind.
This one knows violence,
but he says he loves me:
a lie perpetuated by both sides.

Yet, when you sleep
pressed against me,
both sides surrendering to fatigue,
I dream that the man with whom I fell in love
will be the one to wake up.

VII.

I've come to resent me,
 which is cause enough to despise you,
 I've come to resent me,
 for not seeing all of you.

I live in fear of your body,
 wondering if I ever had your heart
 and if I'll ever have it back.

They ask me why I stay,
 as they see no walls, no chains,
 but those untouched by dark
 don't have the same night vision;

and here, when the sun falls,
 there are walls and chains everywhere—
 one of them cries
 and shares his name.

VIII.

Given grace and given teeth,
 I lean against the body I can feel
 Once again choosing touching hell over numbness.

Every night you remind me of for whom I fall:
 you and gravity,
 as you keep stripping the floors from beneath my
 feet.

I have become so familiar with the edge
 that I have made the arches of my feet
 fulcrums finessing balance
 between you and everything
 I used to be.

IX.

If I am to be celestial,
 then I can no longer live within the gaze of a galaxy
 bent on my implosion

For you are to make me lunar,
 circling a mass while you search the sky
 for other cyclical victims.

To love once
 a hand attached to a body attached to a spirit
 subject to gravity
 is to lose once
 a mind, a heart, and a self,
 once mine,
 twice yours,
 now, no one's.

X.

At the very bottom of the bathtub,
 I hold counsel with myself
 unfolding my fingertips
 and tracing mortality on my palms,

I say "this is not your fault"
 uncovering my eyes and seeing
 that I adopted blindness,

I say "it's time"
 forcing myself to remember
 that the woman below the waterline
 and the woman still breathing
 are the same.

They realign
 as I break the surface,
 rise to my well-worn feet,
 secure my baby's story,
 and finally choose me.

XI.

Chapped lips sapped soul
 I take inventory
 of the calluses and the shards,
 trying to see
 which parts belong
 and which parts
 were never mine.

I'm reminded of the Universe
 as I begin to recognize myself in every face

I pass
 I'm reminded of Gothic pillars
 as I root where I'm planted,
 not yet dancing,
 but nevermore drowning.

I'm reminded of Love
 as I brush my own wrist
 with fingers newly landscaped by nothing.
 And I'm reminded of Light
 as I hold the face of my guardian angel,
 who happens to have my smile.

Chapped lips sapped soul
 I'm reminded by Love
 of everything I was,
 and she comes home.

Composer's Note

I always wanted to write a song cycle, and when I learned that my (now former) student Derby Belser was a poet, I asked her to collaborate with me on creating one, and I am very happy that she agreed. I was always fascinated with Robert Schumann's *Dichterliebe* ("Poet's Love") and *Frauenliebe und leben* ("Woman's Love and Life"), each of which tells a story from the point of a protagonist, and I thought that using one of them as a model while expressing a modern point of view and modern outlook on life would be the way to go. After several months of work, *Falling...* was completed.

The general storyline of *Falling...* loosely follows *Frauenliebe und leben*, which started its existence as a cycle of poems by a German poet of French origin Adelbert von Chamisso. Besides Schumann, it was set to music by several more composers, but Schumann's version reigns supreme. The Schumann/Chamisso cycle, while a masterpiece, presents a Romantic outlook on love—namely, if only the two lovers could be together, their life would be blissful, and the only obstacles to happiness are separation and, ultimately, death. In our work, while following the general arc of the Chamisso story (beginning of the affair, its blossoming, its end, all narrated from the point of view of the woman), we sought to update its sensibilities to the modern age, recognizing that, in reality, the obstacles to happiness in a relationship are as, if not more likely to be internal than external. Thus, *Falling...* became a story of an abusive relationship, told from the point of view of an abused woman.

Falling... was completed in the midst of the pandemic and hopes of a public performance were dim at the time. At some point I came across the short film by David Paul named *Poetlove*, which is a movie version of the other Schumann's song cycle *Dichterliebe*, and it occurred to me that *Falling...* would also naturally lend itself to being staged. I suggested the idea to my friend and colleague Amy Pfrimmer, the head of Tulane Opera and I was very happy when she took on the project. To make it more operatic, I then augmented the scoring of the piece to a piano trio (originally there was only piano accompaniment) and added interludes between the songs, thus creating a new version of a piece that is a proper monodrama.

I would like to thank my co-author Derby Belser; Amy Pfrimmer, who directed the show; Rebecca Keteltas, our superb protagonist; and our excellent orchestra—Christopher Vuong, Hannah Ulatowsky, and Russell Scaife. I can't wait for the premiere!

Poet's Note

In *Falling*, we tried to pin toxic love to a storyline, and express the breadth of emotion and complication that comes with falling for someone abusive. Anytime I write about love, I realize I know it less and experience it more than I thought I did before. I hope listeners have the same experience.

The Company

Rebecca “Becky” Keteltas is a Senior at Tulane University from Bethesda MD. She is currently studying Environmental Studies and Psychology. This is her third production with Tulane Opera where she previously sang the title character of Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* and Miss Pinkerton in *The Old Maid and the Thief*. She would like to thank Dr. Samarov for this beautiful piece and the opportunity to perform it. She would also like to thank Professor Pfrimmer for all of her guidance, teaching, and support and for making opera at Tulane possible even under impossible circumstances.

Russell Scaife is a senior graduating this May with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Performance (cello) and a Bachelor of Science in Cell and Molecular Biology. Nominated by Newcomb Department of Music Faculty, Russell was a 2020 Lucile Trueblood Excellence award winner.

Russell started his musical journey in Lexington, KY, watching and learning from his mother and two brothers who all played cello, before continuing under the tutelage of Leah Hagel-Kahmann. Russell was the principal cellist in his high school orchestra as well as the Central Kentucky Youth Orchestra. He was also a member of the Kentucky All-State Orchestra for 4 years and his senior year his string quartet won the 2017 Macauley Chamber Music Competition. In the summers Russell attended the Stephen Collins Foster Music Camp, the New England Music Camp, the Kentucky Governor’s School for the Arts, and most recently the Brevard Music Festival in both the high school and collegiate divisions. Russell has been the principal cellist of the Tulane University Symphony Orchestra for four years. In 2018 he won the Tulane University Concerto Competition with the Lalo Cello Concerto in d minor. Russell Scaife is a substitute for the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra and has performed with the Louisiana Philharmonic.

Russell has also studied under Benjamin Karp, Rachel Hsieh, and Jonathan Gerhardt. After graduation Russell plans on attending medical school and continue performing with the New Orleans Civic Symphony.

Hannah Ulatowski is a senior at Tulane University studying violin performance and public health. Nominated by Newcomb Department of Music Faculty, Hannah was a 2020 Lucile Trueblood Excellence award winner. She is from Milwaukee, Wisconsin and began studying violin with Kris Hurlbaas at a young age. Hannah began playing violin with the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra in middle school, where she was able to develop her love for music while surrounded by talented musicians and inspiring teachers. In New Orleans, she studies with Hannah Yim, the assistant concertmaster of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. For one semester of her junior year, she also had the opportunity to study abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark, where she took lessons with Anne S e, a teacher at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. During her time at Tulane, she has been an active member of the Tulane University Orchestra. When she is not studying or practicing, she enjoys volunteering at Make Music Nola and Children’s Hospital New Orleans. She also loves hiking, spending time outside, and playing board games with her friends.

Christopher Vuong is a sophomore from New Orleans, LA, studying neuroscience and piano performance at Tulane University. He has won numerous local, state, regional, and national level performance and composition awards. Most recently, these include 2nd prize at the National Federation of Music Clubs’ Lana M. Bailey Past-National-President Concerto Competition (2019), a performance with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra at their 29th Annual Young Artists’ Concerto Competition (2019), a performance with the

Tulane University Orchestra at their Aria/Concerto Competition (2020), and 1st prize in the solo category and 2nd prize in the concerto category for the College Division of the Gulf Coast Steinway Society (2020).

He is not only interested in classical solo piano but also in other genres as well. He plays piano and organ at various local Catholic masses, in addition to weddings and funerals. Other lesser-explored fields include his roles as a chamber musician and as a self-described “amateur jazz enthusiast.” Outside of music, he is planning on attending medical school after graduation from Tulane. His hobbies include video games, reharmonization of songs that really shouldn’t have been messed with, and a penchant for playing chess at a distinctly average level.

The Creative Team

Stage Director and Musical Preparation

A teaching artist, **Amy Pfrimmer** is a Tulane University Associate Professor of Music where she holds the Lillian Gerson Watsky Professorship in Voice. She serves as voice area coordinator, director of Tulane Opera (*Hansel and Gretel* and *The Old Maid and the Thief*), concert vocal series director, and is founder of the Tulane Vocal Arts Festival. Pfrimmer is a past recipient of Tulane University’s Crest Award for Outstanding Faculty and is frequently sought after for her high energy, interactive university/young artist program master classes, and as an adjudicator.

Amy Pfrimmer has sung across the US, Europe, and Canada in opera, concert, and recital and was a 2019 Winner of the American Prize Chicago Oratorio Award. She has soloed with the London Symphony Orchestra, Germany’s Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, Baltimore Choral Arts, Louisiana Philharmonic, United States Marine Corps and Navy Bands, New Orleans Chamber Orchestra, and the Atlanta, Virginia, Santa Barbara, and Illinois Symphony Orchestras in concert repertoire ranging from Schönberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*, to Poulenc’s *Gloria*, Händel’s *Messiah* to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. In opera, Amy has sung with the Florida Grand Opera, Montréal Opera, Bulgarian State Opera Stara Zagora, New Orleans Opera, Mozart Festival Opera, Ohio Light Opera, Opera Birmingham, Mississippi Opera and Shreveport Opera in such operatic roles as The Merry Widow, Violetta, Mimi and Musetta, Cio-Cio San, Nedda, Amahl’s Mother, and Rosalinda. Notably, she collaborated frequently with the late pianist/composer Dave Brubeck in his Mass, *To Hope! A Celebration*, and *La Fiesta de la Posada*. She also soloed across the US with conductor Keith Brion’s New Sousa Band.

With the MSR Classics label, Pfrimmer has released three recordings: *Souvenance: Méloides and Organ Works of César Franck* with pianist/organist Thomas Kientz, *Eternal Life: Sacred Songs and Spirituals* and *The Lost Romantic: Songs of Louise Reichardt*, with pianist Dreux Montegut. Upcoming, Pfrimmer and pianist Peter Collins will record *Méloides of Louis Vierne*.

Poet

A graduate of Tulane University’s music composition program, **Derby Belser** is a composer, poet, and fitness instructor currently finishing up her gap year in New Orleans before heading to England for her Master’s in Music. During her gap year, Derby has been fulfilling choral commissions for New Orleanian high schools, writing musicological

scholarship on popular music's role in American culture, and collaborating with other artists. Falling came out of one of these collaborations, and it explores a topic of which she's quite fond: non-/anti-/un- love.

Composer, Conductor and Musical Preparation

Maxim Samarov was born in Moscow, Russia in a family of musicians and started his music studies at the age of five. He studied cello at Junior College of the Moscow Conservatory and later at Jerusalem Music Academy and Southern Methodist University, and performed extensively as a cello soloist, chamber music player and orchestra member in Russia, Europe, Israel, and the US. He received his degrees in orchestral conducting from University of Missouri-Kansas City and Michigan State University.

Dr. Samarov is currently the orchestra director at Tulane University, where he also teaches music theory, orchestration, and conducting. He has previously held faculty positions with St. Cloud State University (MN) and Luther College (IA). He has appeared as a guest conductor and recorded with several orchestras in Eastern Europe. Dr. Samarov made his operatic debut conducting Verdi's *Rigoletto* at State Opera Burgas (Bulgaria) in 2014 and later conducted Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and Verdi's *La Traviata* at State Opera Stara Zagora, Bulgaria. In 2016, he co-founded New Orleans Chamber Orchestra, a professional ensemble with a mission to showcase the rich classical music tradition of New Orleans.

As a composer, Mr. Samarov is the author of a symphony, a guitar concerto, an opera *Feast at the Time of Plague*, and a number of chamber works; he conducted New Orleans Chamber Orchestra in the premiere of his cantata *Ars Moriendi* in June 2018. Among his current projects is a show involving a Mardi Gras Indian tribe and a symphony orchestra as well as several operatic projects. Dr. Samarov lives in New Orleans with his wife Tanya, a pediatrician, and their son Julian.

Rehearsal Pianist was **Kenneth Leach**.

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the Newcomb Department of Music at Tulane University.

