

# Notes on the Program

By James M. Keller, Program Annotator, The Leni and Peter May Chair

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## ***NYx: Fractured Dreams (Concerto No. 4 for Violin and Orchestra)***

### **Lera Auerbach**

Lera Auerbach was raised in the Russian city of Chelyabinsk, in the Ural Mountains, sometimes known by its honorary title “The Gateway to Siberia.” She left for the United States in 1991, received bachelor’s and master’s degrees in composition from The Juilliard School, and then went to Germany to earn a post-graduate degree in piano from Hannover University of Music, Drama, and Media. Although she appears in this concert as a composer, Auerbach is also active in other creative areas. In the visual arts, she is particularly involved in sculpture and painting, and her works have been included in several exhibitions. She has published three books of poetry in Russian, and her first English-language book, *Excess of Being* (in which she explores the form of the aphorism), was published in 2015. In 1996 she was named Poet of the Year by the International Pushkin Society in New York, and she contributes to the *Best American Poetry* blog through her column, “The Trouble Clef.” She often incorporates all of these forms — musical, visual, and literary — into her creations.

From 2007 to 2012 Auerbach was a Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Today, she serves the WEF as a Cultural Leader, giving presentations on Borderless Creativity. Her LeraArt Foundation, established in 2015, seeks to create an artist-centric paradigm for composers through its Modern Renaissance project.

Auerbach recently was composer-in-residence at the Trans-Siberian Art Festival and the Rheingau Musik Festival in Germany. She has served past residencies with

the Dresden Staatskapelle, São Paulo Symphony, Verbier Festival, Trondheim Festival, Marlboro Music Festival, and Banff Centre, among other institutions. Her honors include the Hindemith Prize, a Golden Mask award, a Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship, and the ECHO Klassik award.

Among recent musical highlights was the premiere of her *The Infant Minstrel and His Peculiar Menagerie* for Violin, Orchestra, and Choir, jointly commissioned by the Bergen Philharmonic (Norway), BBC Symphony Orchestra, and Orchestre de la Suisse Romande (Geneva) for violinist Vadim Gluzman. Other recent premieres include *72 Angels*, “Cantus Angelicus,” introduced by the Netherlands Kamerkoor and the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet (in Amsterdam); her Violin Concerto No. 3, *De Profundis*, commissioned by violinist Vadim Repin and the Trans-Siberian Art Festival; *Tatiana*, a full-length ballet with choreography by John Neumeier (their third major collaboration); and *The Blind*, an immersive multi-sensory a cappella opera, to a libretto

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### **IN SHORT**

**Born:** October 21, 1973, in Chelyabinsk, USSR

**Resides:** in New York City and Hamburg, Germany

**Work composed:** 2016, on commission from the New York Philharmonic, Alan Gilbert, Music Director, with the generous support of the Sorel Organization.

**World premiere:** these performances

**Estimated duration:** ca. 25 minutes

she adapted from an 1890 play by Maurice Maeterlinck — premiered in 2011 in Berlin and then presented at the Lincoln Center Festival in 2013, with audiences blindfolded for the performance.

*The Blind* was her second opera, having been preceded by *Gogol*, which was produced at Vienna's Theater an der Wien in 2011. Her oeuvre

covers many musical genres and media: symphonic, choral, chamber music (including eight string quartets and three piano trios), piano pieces, and a generous selection of work for unaccompanied string and wind instruments.

Concertos figure prominently in Auerbach's catalogue. *NYx* is her fourth for violin, and she has also composed concertos featur-

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## In the Composer's Words

Lera Auerbach has provided these thoughts about *NYx*, which she wrote to spotlight the violinist Leonidas Kavakos:

When the New York Philharmonic commissioned this work, they asked if it could be related to the night. This request delighted me. I am most creative during the dark hours, when the world becomes quiet. When not touring, my days and nights are reversed; reality blurs and the silences pulsate, urging imagination forward.

A piece's form, architecture, and development are priorities in my work. Many of my compositions are in dialogue or are reactions to one another. In contrast to my Violin Concerto No. 3, conceived as a 45-minute one-movement work, Violin Concerto No. 4 is an experiment in fragmentation, structured as 13 interconnected, fractured dreams, in which silences play an important dramatic and constructive role.

In 1991, I arrived as a teenager in New York City after a childhood living in Chelyabinsk, a closed city at the epicenter of Soviet nuclear research and the gateway to Siberia. Growing up in this land of black snow, I often dreamed of ancient Greece, and the book of Greek myths was one of my favorites. The world of jealous gods and god-like humans in those pages seemed more real than the world outside of my windows: full of red flags and the Soviet trinity portraits of Lenin-Marx-Engels, with the occasional bushy eyebrows of Brezhnev looking down at me from the buildings' walls. In some ways the two worlds blurred; the one outside made more sense through the perspective of Greek myths, where it was quite common for power-hungry gods to devour their children. My sudden transition to New York — although unfathomable (my family stayed back in Russia) — seemed strangely natural to me, just an insane and intense dream of an imaginative child, a dream that suddenly became reality.

*Nyx*, Greek goddess of the night and daughter of Chaos, is spelled *NYx* in the concerto's title.



While fractured and contrasting, these dreams are tied together — similar to how images and memories weave a tapestry of hidden truths in our sleep. New York is the city of dreamers, reflecting each person in his or her most vulnerable desires and unguarded self, a black mirror in which everything is possible yet just a fraction out of reach. It is a dream that can never be fully realized. Hopes are fears in disguise. Night wears many guises; in its fractured reflections one may glimpse shimmers of the morrow.

ing piano, cello, string quartet, piano trio, violin and piano, and a pair of works for the unusual combination of violin, viola, vibraphone, and string orchestra. One of the latter is titled *Sogno di Stabat Mater*. The word *sogno* — Italian for “dream” — also stands at the heart of *NYx*, which works its way through 13 disparate dreams, all connected within the flow of this latest concerto.

**Instrumentation:** two flutes and piccolo, oboe and English horn, clarinet and bass clarinet, bassoon and contrabassoon, two horns, trumpet, tenor and bass trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, tam-tam, chimes, orchestra bells, triangle, wood block, vibraphone, marimba, musical saw, harp, celeste, piano, and strings, in addition to the solo violin.

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## Inter-Arts

Lera Auerbach has written this poem as a counterpart to her new composition:

*NYx*

I fall asleep. I wake up again.  
It's late afternoon. Now I'm ready  
to collect my thoughts. Feeling suspicious  
of all early-risers, I'm secretly envious  
of their routines, the predictability  
of their inner clocks. My own clock  
was broken long ago; I live in perpetual  
homemade jet lag, in the twilight time.

I finish my coffee around the time  
when people are ready to go to sleep.  
My day now starts. The piano's beckoning  
with silence. It, too, feels untouched and craves  
caresses. I pet it passingly, closing its  
lid — too late to play now, but I hear the music  
welling up from its guts. I imagine the sounds.  
A gigantic treble clef unlocks my troubles,  
pours them onto the page. I organize them  
by color:

unbearable pain, this way, please,  
you shall fit with the howling trombones;  
the deepest desire I shall save for a violin —  
its seductive tremolo is twisting my heart;  
the melancholy is draped in the velvet of  
the cello,  
its darkening purple blackens my soul.

Writing for the orchestra — I am again a child,  
with an army of coloring pencils in hand,  
a forest of wild harmonies growing  
from my ears and eyes. And all night  
I am coloring paper, the desk, the walls,  
the dark skies beyond. My body is covered  
with black round noteheads as if plagued  
by death.

When the sun hits the window I'm asleep  
at my desk, head on my elbows, hearing  
in my dream all the music that I  
couldn't capture last night. Music —  
free from my ink-covered fingers, unmatched  
socks, clumsy attitudes, learnt  
limitations, headaches, fears; free from my  
memories; free from the sleeper, who smiles  
so blissfully as I never could.