



# 2022-23 Season

## Ensemble 20/21 Presents a "Portrait of Aaron Jay Kernis"

Curtis's widely acclaimed group closes the 2022-23 season with *Earth* and *Goblin Market*, two mesmerizing works by Pulitzer Prize- and GRAMMY Award-winning composer Aaron Jay Kernis

PHILADELPHIA, PA—March 16, 2023—**Ensemble 20/21** presents a "**Portrait of Aaron Jay Kernis**," the contemporary music ensemble's final program for the 2022–23 season, on **Saturday, March 25, 2023, at 8:00 p.m.**, in **Gould Rehearsal Hall** at the **Curtis Institute of Music**. Hailed by *The New York Times* for his "fearless originality [and] powerful voice," the work of Pulitzer Prize- and GRAMMY Award-winning composer **Aaron Jay Kernis** is known for its eclectic scope and influences that draw on a broad spectrum of inspirational sources from cantorial music to jazz, salsa, hip-hop, and disco. Under the baton of renowned Curtis alumna **Sarah Ioannides** (Conducting '98), music director of Symphony Tacoma, Ensemble 20/21 celebrates the dramatic breadth and beauty of Kernis's exquisite vocal writing. The concert opens with the East Coast premiere of his recent 2022 opus, *Earth*, featuring a performance by acclaimed young tenor **Laurence Kilsby**, currently a member of the Académie at Opera National de Paris. "Portrait of Aaron J. Kernis" concludes with a clever setting of Christina Rossetti's 1862 poem *Goblin Market*, featuring a lush, proto-Romantic score and a spellbinding recitation of the text by first-year Curtis vocal student, soprano **Maya Mor Mirtrani**.

"I am thrilled to be returning to Curtis Institute and Philadelphia, my hometown, for this special portrait concert," says **Aaron Jay Kernis**. "It's especially gratifying to have these two works programmed together, which center on my love of text and the voice."

"It is a great honor to welcome Aaron, one of the world's leading composers, back to his native Philadelphia," says **Nick DiBerardino** (Composition '18), Ensemble 20/21 director, acclaimed composer, chair of composition studies, and senior associate dean of performance studies at Curtis. "We are delighted for our composers to learn from him, for our performers to engage with his work, and for our audiences to hear these spectacular pieces of vocal chamber music."

Praised by *Classical Voice North America* as "a rich work whose urgency must be heard," Kernis's *Earth* grapples with one of the most important, yet polarizing issues of our time—the global environmental crisis.

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Written in collaboration with poet and agricultural researcher Kai Hoffman-Krull, the work's first movement, entitled "Seasons," follows the life of a farmer as it explores how those who depend upon the land must adapt to the rapidly shifting threats of climate change. In movement two ("Farewell"), he draws inspiration from the 1798 poetry of William Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, a powerful ode to childhood and the wonders of nature. *Earth* opens with the line, "Why are seasons no longer the seasons of before?" Throughout this mesmerizing work, Kernis draws the audience in, inviting his listeners to reflect upon their daily actions in hopes that this compelling work might motivate positive and impactful environmental behavior.

Christina Rossetti's 1862 poem *Goblin Market* has long been analyzed, dissected, and discussed by literary and social critics alike. While contemporaries of the Victoria-era writer might have regarded her audacious poem as a simple fairy tale or moral fable, this inventive story about two sisters, Laurie and Lizzie, who find themselves propositioned by goblins and tempted with luscious, "forbidden" fruit, continues to spark debate. Composer Aaron Jay Kernis joins the throngs of interpreters across the ages with an inspired setting of the poem for narrator and chamber orchestra.

"At the time of writing the work the AIDS epidemic was at its height," says Kernis. "Certainly the parallels between the poisoning at the heart of the text made the urgency to set it feel even more palpable. As I read more in the growing body of post-Freudian scholarship about the *Goblin Market* poem, it became far less possible to read the text purely as a children's story. The 20th century readings of the text I explored viewed it as suffused with elements of latent sensuality and sexuality, issues of male and female power and control, tensions between free and religious morality, freedoms for women within a straitjacketed society, and a whole host of metaphors related to Christina Rossetti's sheltered life within the context of Victorian social mores."

Ensemble 20/21 brings to life Kernis's intoxicating score, capturing the frightening bustle of the fruit seller's market, the menacing, grotesque goblins, and the plight of the two sisters. Is this an allegory of profeminism, an allusion to Genesis and the Garden of Eden, a critique of advertising in pre-capitalist England, a discussion about the psychology of the divided self, or a commentary on feminine sexuality in the nineteenth century? The inspiration for Rossetti's original poem might remain somewhat of a mystery, but its themes of desire and repression continue to resonate in the twenty-first century.

Winner of two 2019 GRAMMY Awards (including "Best Contemporary Classical Composition" for his violin concerto for James Ehnes), a Pulitzer Prize, Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition, and Nemmers Award, **Aaron Jay Kernis** is one of America's most performed and honored composers. His music appears prominently on concert programs worldwide, and he has been commissioned by America's preeminent performing organizations and artists, including the New York and Royal Liverpool Philharmonics, San Francisco, Toronto, and Melbourne (AU) Symphonies, Los Angeles and Saint Paul Chamber and Minnesota Orchestras, Walt Disney Company, The Knights, San Francisco Girls and Brooklyn Youth Choruses, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Renee Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, Joshua Bell, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, and Sharon Isbin to name a few.

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His works have been recorded on Nonesuch, Naxos, Phoenix, Onyx, Signum, Virgin Cedille, and Argo, with which Mr. Kernis had an exclusive recording contract, and many other labels. Recent and upcoming are discs including his new flute concerto with flutist Marina Piccinini and Leonard Slatkin/Marin Alsop conducting the Peabody Symphony; his third string quartet (“River”) as part of the Jasper Quartet’s The Kernis Project; the Grammy-winning recording of his violin concerto for James Ehnes with the Seattle Symphony and Ludovic Morlot; and the Nashville Symphony and Giancarlo Guerrero of recent orchestral music.

He is the Workshop Director of the Nashville Symphony Composer Lab and, for 15 years, served as New Music Adviser to the Minnesota Orchestra, with which he co-founded and directed its Composer Institute for 11 years. Kernis teaches composition at Yale School of Music and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Classical Music Hall of Fame. Leta Miller’s book-length portrait of Kernis and his work was published in 2014 by University of Illinois Press as part of its American Composer series.

Flexible in size and scope, **Ensemble 20/21** performs a wide range of music from the 20th and 21st centuries, including works by Curtis students and alumni. The ensemble has appeared at major U.S. venues such as the Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, and the Miller Theatre, as well as international venues. The ensemble has also presented concert portraits of iconic composers in residence Tania León, Alvin Singleton, Unsuk Chin, John Corigliano, George Crumb, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Chen Yi, among many others.

### **Ticketing Information**

Subscriptions are available for Curtis’s 2022–23 season. The flexible Choose Your Own subscription option offers 25% off ticket prices when purchasing tickets to two or more performances. For the 2022–23 season, Curtis is also offering a new Season Pass, with access to all remaining performances in the 2022–23 season for \$99. To order a subscription, visit [Curtis.edu/Subscribe](https://www.curtis.edu/Subscribe), call (215) 893-7902, or email [tickets@curtis.edu](mailto:tickets@curtis.edu).

Single tickets for Ensemble 20/21 performances and the 2022–23 season start at \$19: [Curtis.edu/Ensemble2021](https://www.curtis.edu/Ensemble2021)

Visit [Curtis.edu/Calendar](https://www.curtis.edu/Calendar) to view Curtis’s entire season of performances and events.

### **About the Curtis Institute of Music**

The Curtis Institute of Music educates and trains exceptionally gifted young musicians to engage a local and global community through the highest level of artistry. For nearly a century Curtis has provided each member of its small student body with an unparalleled education alongside musical peers, distinguished by a “learn by doing” philosophy and personalized attention from a faculty that includes a high proportion of actively performing musicians. With admissions based solely on artistic promise, no student is turned away due to financial need. Curtis invests in each admitted student, ensuring no tuition is charged for their studies and they enter the profession free from educational debt. Each year Curtis students hone their craft through more than 200 orchestra, opera, and solo and chamber music offerings in Philadelphia and around the world. Learn more at [Curtis.edu](https://www.curtis.edu).

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**ENSEMBLE 20/21**  
**A PORTRAIT OF AARON JAY KERNIS**

**Saturday, March 25, 2023, at 8 p.m.**

Gould Rehearsal Hall, Curtis Institute of Music, 1616 Locust Street, Philadelphia

Sarah Ioannides ('98), conductor

Laurence Kilsby, tenor

Maya Mor Mirtrani, narrator

**PROGRAM**

AARON JAY KERNIS

*Earth*

*Goblin Market*

Single tickets for Ensemble 20/21 performances and the 2022–23 season start at \$19:

**[Curtis.edu/Ensemble2021](https://www.curtis.edu/Ensemble2021)**. Season subscriptions are also available.

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