

About This Program

When contemplating Longy's theme for this academic year, "**Start Anywhere**", I decided to start my own program in the here and now and work backwards through my life via music. In this program we will begin with an outcry by a tired and scared woman about the here and now, and end with an innocent high school girl with a breathy voice who was assigned her very first art song by her first classical voice teacher.

This program is extremely personal, and I am sharing with you as an audience member a closer look at my life.

The here and now is, in a word, difficult.

I have many joys in my life; my family, friends and music, amongst other things.

I know that I am not alone in feeling the weariness and pain of the last three years.

On top of the pandemic, a divorce, raising two small children and working full time, the state of the world troubles me deeply. As a progressive, feminist, agnostic, anti-gun, climate-concerned citizen and mother, I fear for the future of society and of mankind.

So I commissioned my dear friend Omar Najmi, accomplished composer and tenor, to write the **first piece** on the program, *E Pluribus Unum*, which means "Out of many, one". This is the traditional motto of the United States, and appears on the Great Seal.

The title is meant to be in dissonance with the text, which is taken from three June 2022 Supreme Court decisions. All three decisions shared the same vote of 6 to 3, and all three display the severely divided state of our nation. I invite you to reflect on the court's decisions and your own beliefs and feelings about these cases.

The first case, 21-418 Kennedy v. Bremerton School District (6/27/2022), held that high school football coach Joseph Kennedy was improperly placed on administrative leave for praying midfield after football games. This controversial case exemplifies the complicated intersection of free speech and the separation of church and state. Daniel Mach, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, said: "This decision is deeply disappointing and undermines the religious liberty of public school students. As the Supreme Court recognized over 60 years ago, it's inherently coercive for school officials to pray with students while on duty. Today's ruling ignores that basic principle and tramples the religious freedom of students who may not share the preferred faith of their coaches and teachers."

In the second case, 20-843 New York State Rifle and Pistol Association, Inc. v. Bruen (6/23/2022), plaintiffs challenged the 100-year old handgun licensing law in New York State which requires individuals to show proper cause before they can be licensed to carry a concealed weapon in public. New York argued that the right to carry a weapon for self-defense outside the

home is not absolute, and I sure do agree. The plaintiffs won. Looser gun laws amidst the constant, unrelenting slaughter of American citizens by gun; a major step backward for gun control.

The third case, 19-1392 Dobbs v. Jackson (6/24/2022) overturned Roe v. Wade. I don't believe this needs any explanation from me. I will simply state regarding this case that I am grateful to live in a state that respects a woman's right to control her own body and future.

The **second piece** on the program is a song cycle for SATB vocal quartet by Tom Cipullo, **Insomnia**. This cycle takes both a realistic and a comedic look at insomnia and its many causes, toils and troubles. I began suffering from insomnia almost thirty years ago at age twelve, around the time of my parent's divorce, and have struggled with this issue throughout my life. Insomnia was particularly prevalent for me during the pandemic and, prior to that, during the infant and toddler years of both of my sons. In these selections from the cycle, we will explore the voices we hear in our head (and inner anxieties we replay) when we are trying to sleep, the noises of the house that haunt us and keep us awake, a disturbing thunderstorm, the obnoxious snoring of the person next to us....and more.

There is no music without collaboration, and I am absolutely thrilled to have so many **dear friends and colleagues** on stage with me tonight to perform several awesome vocal quartet works. These artists have played integral roles in my life. First, my pianist Christina. She and I have known each other for over fifteen years and have been collaborating for most of them. Next, Megan; who happens to be my best friend. We met at the Brevard Music Program in 2005, where we shared the stage in a production of Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Megan and I have performed countless recitals together, and she is a champion of art song. She founded the art song society *Calliope's Call* which does incredible work keeping art song relevant. It was through this organization that I was introduced to some of the quartets you will hear tonight. Brendan and I met as teenagers while studying as undergraduate music majors at UMass Amherst. We have been friends for over twenty years and our children are good friends too. It was important to me to include an artist that journeyed with me at UMass, as these were by far my most formative musical years. Finally, one of my newest friends and colleagues, Tyler, who I have so enjoyed getting to know here at Longy where he is the director of admissions and a member of the voice faculty. Thank you so much to all of you for being with me on this journey.

Third on the program is Schubert's iconic song *Gretchen am Spinnrade*. I have performed this piece countless times and it remains one of my favorite (and most vocally comfortable) works in my repertoire. I chose this piece to represent the period of my life from roughly **2006-2016**. The word that comes to mind for this decade is **HUSTLE**. I achieved more in this time period than I expect I might for the entire rest of my life. The relentless spinning riff of the piano in this piece shows the inner wheel that spun, faster and faster, keeping me going and achieving and growing.

It also represents the anxiety disorder that fueled (and fuels) the overachievement. In retrospect, the amount accomplished in this period was actually insane and almost definitely unhealthy. Within this decade I founded an opera company (MassOpera), attended five young artist programs, got a doctorate, ran a private studio, taught for seven summers at the BU Tanglewood Institute, spent two years on the full time voice faculty of UMass Amherst, developed a specialty in performing oratorio and concert work, taught at NEC's preparatory school, started a career coaching business, got married and became pregnant with my first child. Just to name a few highlights....

Whew. I need a break after thinking about that period of my life. Don't you? Deep breath. Let's take a **brief intermission!**

Continuing our journey backwards, I want to visit my years as a master's student at the New England Conservatory. These two years were a real mixed bag. I learned so much and was well trained by many wonderful artists while there. I met some of my best friends. But I felt stifled by the traditional conservatory training and outdated career path ideals (which, positively, helped fuel my future career coaching and singer advocacy work). I was fat shamed in front of peers, and missed out on onstage experience because of how I looked. I lost 100 pounds during the second year, and experienced the fascination and rage that comes with realizing almost everyone around you treats you like a completely different person once you stop being so fat. It was a highly emotional, complicated and confusing time.

One great solace during this degree was preparing for my master's recital. I have always cherished art song and was very excited to do Poulenc's *Fiançailles pour rire*. The song **Violon** is a sensual, sexy, cabaret-esque song from this cycle. I think the reason I love it so much is because singing it in my Spring 2005 master's recital was the first time I could sing something sexy while actually feeling sexy. I had shrunk myself to fit society's body ideals, and at that time I was reveling in the attention and the newfound confidence. To be clear, I very much believe now that a person should feel beautiful, sexy and worthy at absolutely any size...I just didn't believe that in 2005.

I don't have enough time or space to tell you about all the wonderful experiences I had while I was an undergraduate student at UMass Amherst. My voice teacher Marjorie Melnick remains a good friend and mentor and I will be forever grateful for her guidance and expertise. One of the highlights of my rich, formative experience there was singing in the chamber choir, which was highly selective and hard to get into. The **Brahms Zigeunerlieder** were some of the most delightful and fun pieces we did (under the baton of E. Wayne Abercrombie, who was also a conducting mentor of mine - yup, I conduct!) So, I have chosen to showcase a few of my favorites tonight.

Another amazing part of my education at UMass was being allowed, as a classical voice major, to minor in vocal jazz. I grew up with a professional jazz bassist dad, and jazz was in my veins. As a minor, I took weekly jazz voice lessons, learned to improvise, read charts, and participated in the high-level vocal jazz ensemble. My undergraduate was progressive and open-minded enough to say to me “you don’t have to choose definitively what genres you will sing, try things out!”. In the early 2000s, that was a big deal, and I was lucky. **Kile Smith**’s quartet cycle *April Showers*, while new to me as of this past year, represents the wonderful period of experimentation and artistry at UMass when I was allowed to let the jazz in me come out.

I will end this program with the **very first art song** I was ever assigned, *Tell Me, Oh Blue, Blue Sky* by **Giannini**.

I started taking voice lessons at thirteen with the local musical theater teacher (I grew up in Yorktown Heights, in Westchester, NY). Let’s just say that it became clear that musical theater wasn’t really.....my thing. She recognized that I was better suited to classical singing and had the good sense to send me to an “opera teacher” when I was fifteen. Her name is Jennifer Eyges, and she is a big Dana supporter to this day. Thank you, Jennifer, for giving me this beautiful and challenging art song. You knew I wouldn’t be satisfied with Caro mio ben. It was just right.

Thank you for journeying backwards with me tonight. I have laid my heart and soul bare through this music, and can only hope that my future continues to hold rewarding and exciting musical experiences.