

MODLIN ARTS PRESENTS

WHAT BELONGS TO YOU

an opera for tenor and
chamber orchestra

September 26 and 28, 2024
7:30 PM

Alice Jepson Theatre

PHOTO: EMIL BÅLAND

Modlin



PHOTO: CORY WEAVER

MODLIN CENTER FOR THE ARTS PRESENTS

THE WORLD PREMIERE OF

What Belongs to You

an opera by **David T. Little**

Based on the novel by **Garth Greenwell**

Karim Sulayman as “The American”

Alarm Will Sound

Alan Pierson, Music Director

Mark Morris, Director

Maile Okamura, Set and Costume Design

Nicole Pearce and Mike Faba, Lighting Design

Maciej Lewandowski, Stage Manager

Tonight’s performance will last approximately 90 minutes, including intermission.

PROGRAM NOTES

Garth Greenwell's debut novel *What Belongs to You* "tells the story of a man caught between longing and resentment, unable to separate desire from danger, and faced with the impossibility of understanding those he most longs to know." This manifests as an infatuation with a hustler named Mitko, with whom the unnamed narrator begins a long, unstable, and ultimately destructive affair. The story is specific and personal, but the experience Greenwell describes is universal: the search for self and the desire to belong amidst loneliness and enduring heartbreak. It is no wonder I was drawn to adapt it as an opera: these themes have also haunted my own work over the years, alongside my interest in time, fate, and the sacred.

Like some of this earlier work, *What Belongs to You* looks back to look forward; toward the mysterious blend of the erotic and devotional found in Britten, Dowland, Monteverdi, Valentini, Schubert, and Grisey; to the seriousness of devotion found in artists like Zurbarán, and the patina of fading beauty evoked by vanitas paintings. These were all sources of inspiration for me as I composed *What Belongs to You*. Greenwell likewise tells his story through language that imbues a kind of spiritual transcendence into the erotic, a quality seen in many of his own literary influences: James Baldwin, Henry James, Jean Genet, and St. Augustine, his favorite writer.

What Belongs to You progresses in distinct scenes, without the sort of transitional material one might expect in opera. Images appear, communicate, and move on as we turn the page. This is a particular way of achieving what has been called the "compressed logic" that opera requires, and feels akin to the experience of viewing Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* paintings, where we move between panels showing different plot points and make our own connections between them, as we allow the meaning to gradually accumulate.

This approach allows me to tell rich, often complicated stories in ways that feel both lean and contemporary, but also connected to the past. This aspect of the form is important, as it not only mirrors the intimate privacy of Greenwell's unnamed narrator, but also the solitary act of reading. It allows the interior to become personal to each audience member and, as Greenwell has said about his own work and its connection to St. Augustine "by turning inward one somehow arrives at a revelation, a truth that can be communicated to others."

This is the very experience that moved me so tremendously when first reading *What Belongs to You*. It is what drew me to it, made me cherish it and feel the sacred in it. It is what inspired me to give it a life in music and on stage. It is my hope that through this performance, the audience may also find something meaningful, and true.

What Belongs to You was commissioned by Alarm Will Sound and the Modlin Center for the Arts at the University of Richmond, with the kind support of Linda H. and Richard N. Claytor, Ph.D., and Andrew Martin-Weber. It premiered on September 26, 2024, at the Modlin Center, in a production directed by Mark Morris, conducted by Alan Pierson, and starring Karim Sulayman, for whom it was written. Alarm Will Sound was the orchestra, costumes and set were by Maile Okamura, and lighting was by Nicole Pearce. Special thanks are also due to Eileen Mack, Paul Brohan, Nancy Umanoff, Jeffrey Edelstein, Steven Lankenau, Elizabeth Blaufox, Maggie Heskin, Carol Ann Cheung, and Katy Salomon; and to Garth Greenwell, whose trust in allowing me to adapt his work has meant the world to me.

David T. Little,
April 16, 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ALARM WILL SOUND PERSONNEL

Erin Lesser, flutes
Christa Robinson, oboes
Eileen Mack, clarinets
Elisabeth Stimpert, clarinets
Michael Harley, bassoons
Laura Weiner, horn
Tim Leopold, trumpet
Michael Clayville, trombone
Chris P. Thompson, percussion
Matt Smallcomb, percussion
John Orfe, piano, synthesizer
Courtney Orlando, violin
Patti Kilroy, violin
Gillian Gallagher, viola
Stefan Freund, cello
Miles Brown, bass

William Stanton, Sound Engineer
Alan Pierson, conductor and
Artistic Director
Gavin Chuck, Executive Director
Peter Ferry, Assistant Director of
Artistic Planning
Jason Varvaro, Production Manager
Annie Toth, General Manager
Tracy Mendez, Development Manager
Michael Clayville, Director of Marketing
Bill Kalinkos, Librarian
Uday Singh, Program Coordinator



PHOTO: MAILE OKAMURA