

Roulette Intermedium and Performing Artservices present

Robert Ashley



September 12 - 14, 2025

Roulette Intermedium 509 Atlantic Avenue Brooklyn, NY www.roulette.org The fear is that we won't go gently or abruptly into that good night. We will hang on in the endurance trials of old age, forever rehearsing in the early morning twilight, fortified by a few hours of faulty sleep, the plot or why there is no plot, the explanations, the why, the lists, the old grievances never to be settled now, the stories never told or passed on, the interruptions, the terrifying proportions, everything larger than it is known to be, distorted in the mirror, and again and again.

Old people are special because they have no future. The future is what to eat for breakfast or where did I leave my shoes. Everything else is in the past. Is this understandable?

So, sometimes old people break the rules. Especially the rules of conversation and being together. They laugh a lot. I mean real full laughter. Did you ever notice that? They break the rules, because, for one reason or another (illness, anger, damage, enough of that, whatever), the rules no longer apply for them. They are alone. Sometimes they are sad. Sometimes they are desperate. Mostly they are brave. Mostly they have given up on the promises of religion – life after death, immortality, etc. Mostly they are concerned with dignity. Living with dignity. And, like all of us, eventually dying with dignity.

But they are still obliged, as human beings, to make sounds. They are obliged to speak – whether or not anyone is listening.

- Robert Ashley, 2003

Celestial Excursions

Music and libretto Robert Ashley

Musical direction, sound design and live mix

Tom Hamilton

Performers
Gelsey Bell
Kayleigh Butcher
Mario Diaz-Moresco
Brian McCorkle
Paul Pinto

Electronic orchestra

Robert Ashley and Tom Hamilton

Lighting and stage design **David Moodey**

Scenic elements built by Paul Everett

Piano Embellishments in Act I and Act III
"Blue" Gene Tyranny

Producer Mimi Johnson

Press Representative Janet Stapleton

Celestial Excursions was commissioned by Performing Artservices, Inc. as part of the national series of works of Meet the Composer/Arts Endowment Commissioning Music/USA, which is made possible by generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Helen F. Whitaker Fund, and the Catherine Filene Shouse Foundation. Celestial Excursions was originally produced and presented at the Hebbel-Theater by MaerzMusik / Berliner Festspiele.

Act I ("Is It Light Yet?") is a series of personal songs, the kind rehearsed in the early morning, every morning, to try to get the story right. These are separated by short bulletins of what some of the rest of the people on earth are up to.

Kayleigh Butcher Characters Alcohol Brian McCorkle Mr. or Ms. or Mrs. N Paul Pinto Love Letter, Part 1 Brian McCorkle Bruno, Part 1 Mario Diaz-Moresco Love Letter, Part 2 Brian McCorkle Bruno, Part 2 Mario Diaz-Moresco Subaru Brian McCorkle Raoul Gelsey Bell Goodbye Walnut Brian McCorkle

Act II ("Asylum") is a dialogue between four guests at the Assisted Living Facility and the counselor, who is trying to explain to them that the burden they feel, which might seem to be explained in words, is not to be relieved by finding the word of escape, and in fact will never be relieved. Occasionally the guests break into song to relieve the tension.

Asylum Brian McCorkle
Songs Bell, Butcher, Diaz-Moresco, Pinto

The List, Depression, What About the Kids?, Baguette, I Love That Stuff, I Had It and I Lost It, Recent Attendance, After All the Stuff, Ghosts, It's Got To Be a Secret, It's Only Fun, I Like Q, Good Idea, Never on Your Mind, It's Almost 10 O'Clock Kids, Ordinary Man, Years of Desire

Act III ("The River Deepens") is a series of reminiscences in a mixture of past and present tense. The importance of the reminiscence is its persistence. Separations never heal. Friendships misused never forgive. A mistake is a mistake forever.

Ozzie Smith
Brian McCorkle
Therapy
Gelsey Bell
Nightmare
Mario Diaz-Moresco
Grandmother
Paul Pinto
Yes, I Know
Kayleigh Butcher

About the Cast and Collaborators:

Robert Ashley (1930 – 2014) is known for his work in new forms of opera. In Ann Arbor in the 1960s, Ashley organized the ONCE Festival and directed the legendary ONCE Group, with whom he developed his first operas. Throughout the 1970s, he directed the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College and toured with the Sonic Arts Union. He produced and directed Music with Roots in the Aether, a 14-hour television opera/documentary about the work and ideas of seven American composers. His opera for television *Perfect Lives* is widely considered to be the precursor of "music-television." Stage versions of *Perfect Lives*, *Atalanta (Acts of God)*, *Improvement (Don Leaves Linda)*, *Foreign Experiences*, *eL/Aficionado* and *Now Eleanor's Idea* toured throughout the US and Canada, Europe and Asia during the 1980s and 1990s. *Dust*, followed by *Celestial Excursions* and *The Old Man Lives in Concrete* toured from 1999 to 2012. He finished his last two operas (*Crash* and *Quicksand*) in 2013. *Crash* was presented as part of the 2014 Whitney Biennial; *Quicksand* was presented by The Kitchen in early 2016. www.robertashley.org

Gelsey Bell is a Brooklyn-based multidisciplinary performance creator, composer, and vocalist. She is a core member of thingNY, Varispeed, and the Chutneys. Her recent works include Archaeopteris, a one-act commissioned by the Wet Ink Ensemble; mounty [morning/mourning], an experimental opera commissioned by the HERE Arts Center and presented in the Prototype Festival; Mouthful, made with thingNY; and Cairns, an ongoing soundwalk for Green-Wood Cemetery. She also recently released the original cast recording of mounty, the album Skylighght with Erin Rogers, and her solo album Heads Together. She has performed many works by Robert Ashley including Crash, Improvement, Foreign Experiences and Varispeed's arrangement of Perfect Lives. Other performance highlights include Dave Malloy's Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812 (Broadway) and Ghost Quartet, Darius Jones's Samesoul Maker, Aaron Siegel's Rainbird, Alaina Ferris's The Lydian Gale Parr, and other works by John King, Paul Pinto, Brent Michael Davids, Kate Soper, Tomomi Adachi, and Raven Chacon. www.gelseybell.com

Described as a singer with "commanding interpretive depth" (New York Times) as well as having a "pure vocal talent" (Opera Wire Magazine), **Kayleigh Butcher** (mezzo soprano) has gained critical and audience acclaim as a soloist and contemporary chamber musician. Kayleigh was a founding member of Quince Ensemble, an all-treble, a cappella vocal quartet that explores experimental vocal techniques and improvisation. She was also a founding member of Shepherdess with Hajnal Pivnick, an NYC-based violin and voice duo. Kayleigh received her Bachelor of Music from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory, where she studied with Dr. Anne DeLaunay and

Dr. Denise Knowlton. She was a graduate teaching assistant to Dr. Jane Schoonmaker Rodgers at Bowling Green State University, where she earned her Master of Music. She currently resides in Brooklyn with her dog Simon. www. kayleighbutcher.com

Mario Diaz-Moresco's career highlights include; To My Distant Love with On Site Opera, film productions of Hansel & Gretel with Opera Ithaca and Playground Opera, Robert Ashley's Dust with Mannes The New School, which was named one of the best classical music performances of 2017 by the New York Times, performances of the music of Joan La Barbara at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Roulette, Hydrogen Jukebox with Chautauqua Opera, Papageno in Die Zauberflöte with the Dubuque Symphony Orchestra, performances with the Brooklyn Art Song Society, recitals with pianist Spencer Myer for InConcert Sierra, the Chamber Music Festival of Saugatuck, the Nantucket Musical Arts Society, the Mendocino Music Festival and the South Haven Performance Series. Mario has been a young artist with The Glimmerglass Festival, Central City Opera, Chautaugua Opera, the Ravinia Festival, SongFest and was a resident singer for three cycles of AOP's Composers & the Voice. He holds degrees from Mannes The New School, the University of Southern California, the University of Colorado Boulder and is a student of Diana Soviero, www.mariodiazmoresco.com

Tom Hamilton has combined the activities of audio production and music composition into an artistic career of over five decades. Since 1990, Hamilton has been a member of the composer Robert Ashley's touring opera ensemble, performing sound processing and mixing in both recordings and concerts. He has served as Music Director in productions of Ashley's operas *Crash*, *Improvement*, *eL/Aficionado*, *Foreign Experiences* and *Celestial Excursions* and composed and produced the music for productions of Ashley's *Quicksand* and *A Last Futile Stab at Fun*. His audio production is found on over 100 recordings of prominent contemporary musicians. Hamilton's music references the 1970s era of analog electronics, and contrasts structure with improvisation and textural electronics with acoustic instruments. He employs "aural scores" to connect performers to a changing context of electronic sound, prompting the use of "present-time listening" by both performer and listener. Hamilton is a Fellow of the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, and his work has been awarded in the Prix Ars Electronica. www.lovely.com/artists/a-hamilton.html

Brian McCorkle is a composer, performer, and digital artist, as well as former co-Director of the opera company and venue Panoply Performance Laboratory, and a founding member of Varispeed. McCorkle performs regularly as a multi-instrumentalist and vocalist, flouting genre while drawing from decades of experience as a professional musician in a wide variety of contexts. Recent Roulette performances include Robert Ashley's *Foreign Experiences*, Jeffrey

Schanzer's *The Past is Present* and Varispeed's collaboration with Peggy Weil, *The Blurring Test.* It is always an honor and a pleasure to perform Ashley's work, thanks to Mimi and Tom for having me on the team. www.brianmccorkle.work

David Moodey has collaborated with Robert Ashley since 1999, most recently designing for the remounting of Ashley's *Foreign Experiences* at Roulette. He is the principal designer and production manager for Molissa Fenley and Robert Ashley. His design for Fenley's *State of Darkness* earned him a Bessie award for lighting design. He designed for Peter Boal's three seasons at the Joyce Theater, New York, and in 2017 for a production of John Henry Redwood's play *The Old Settler*, directed by Michele Shay at the Billie Holiday Theater in Brooklyn. He has also designed lights and sets for over a dozen shows at NYU's Experimental Theatre Wing since 2000. He currently holds an International Alliance of Theatrical State Employees Local One position with Jazz at Lincoln Center as one of the heads of the Appel Room. www.davidmoodey.com

Paul Pinto creates and performs multi-disciplinary opera-theater, installation and performance. Sometimes with his longtime friends thingNY and Varispeed. And sometimes alone in his bedroom. Some highlights include Meredith Monk's Indra's Net, Patriots with Jeff Young, Gelsey Bell's mounting [morning/mourning], Peter Maxwell Davies' Eight Songs for a Mad King, the cyclorama video installation Whiteness with Kameron Neal, an ongoing re-arrangement of Robert Ashley's Perfect Lives, and his first opera Thomas Paine in Violence. He sang and danced on Broadway in Dave Malloy's Great Comet of 1812 and created many tiny performances during the pandemic for Zoom, head phones and the U.S. mail. Lately he's been singing songs about rivers from his 2024 album Water Music. Coming up in February, Paul premieres his operatic monodrama Mano a Mano at La Mama, directed by Kristin Marting. He's a child of immigrants, born and raised in Richmond Hill, Queens, Paul now proudly calls Jersey City his home, because that's where his wife, his child, and his vegetable garden are. www.pfpinto.com

Mimi Johnson is founder and director of two renowned and long-lived cultural service organizations, Performing Artservices (1972) and Lovely Music (1978). She was married to Robert Ashley and continues to produce his work. Johnson serves on the boards of directors of the Destina Foundation, the Dorothea Tanning Foundation, Roulette and Object Collection.

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Libretto:

The *Celestial Excursions* libretto-text can be read or downloaded at www.robertashley.org/librettos/Celestial-Excursions-Libretto.pdf

About Roulette:

Founded in 1978 by a group of artists in a Tribeca loft in NYC, Roulette has grown into an internationally recognized performing arts venue and presenter of experimental music, dance, and intermedia featuring some of today's most prolific artists and their extraordinary emerging counterparts. Roulette presents 100+ annual performances alongside an additional 150 community/rental events, serving up to 70,000 annual visitors in a 12,000-square-foot venue in Downtown Brooklyn. In addition to its robust in-person and virtual live programming, Roulette presents a monthly podcast, weekly and monthly radio shows, and weekly TV segments on Manhattan and Brooklyn public access. Roulette's mission is to support artists and present performances of innovative music, movement, and media art; build audiences interested in experiencing new work; and trace the evolution of experimental performance in a freely accessible public archive. Visit www.roulette.org

