

# The New York Times

## New Music From Silence for the New York Philharmonic

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By DAVID ALLEN  
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Alan Gilbert, music director of the New York Philharmonic, returns to its podium this week. Not coincidentally, so does new music. Cue Lera Auerbach’s Violin Concerto No. 4, written for Leonidas Kavakos and receiving its premiere at David Geffen Hall on Wednesday.

Titled “NYx: Fractured Dreams,” the concerto is a sequence of 13 sections, or “dreams,” suggesting a night punctuated by visions, nightmares and the silences of sleep. Asked jointly to choose an illustrative page from a piece neither has yet fully heard, Ms. Auerbach and Mr. Kavakos picked the work’s first eight bars: a violin solo that sets up a polarity between airy whisper and forceful brutality. Here are edited excerpts from the conversation.

How have you been thinking about this concerto?

LEONIDAS KAVAKOS My approach starts from the obvious keyword, which is dreams. But dreams come while sleeping. Since we are using Greek words, Nyx is the night; Hypnos is sleep; and Oneiroi, dreams. So this is for me a starting point, together with another keyword: silence. It starts with this little silent idea, a composed silence that has a face, a shape, a nature. If we look at most of the mythologies, what is amazing is that the moments where there is ultimate communication, these moments are usually silent moments. This is also clear between us mortals, in our lives: Many times we just look at somebody, and before you even say something you have already said it all.

LERA AUERBACH The first statement is recitativo: “as it comes.” Whereas what



The violinist Leonidas Kavakos rehearsing with the composer Lera Auerbach, who wrote a new violin concerto for him, in the green room of David Geffen Hall.

comes next is extremely rhythmic. This is two faces of time: the cage of time, which we face with our clocks, our business, our everyday ambitions, all this surface; and then maybe the desire to break free from that, the desire to see time as timeless. There is something very intimate, vulnerable, yet powerful about the sound of a violin alone. Starting with this violin presence, a personal voice introduces this juxtaposition between this timeless, dreamy world — like you’re trying to remember something in the back of your mind, but you can’t quite grasp what — and this very violent, contrasting, structured, forceful nature.

KAVAKOS It will be even more important, in this case, to really get silence in the hall before that first note sounds. I was thinking the other day that I imagine this piece performed in a very dark hall. It would free people’s minds and ears. Of course, that’s quite difficult to achieve.

Where did the idea for the piece come from?

AUERBACH The inspiration comes from dreams, our approach to time. Our memories — sometimes the past, the present, maybe even some premonition of the future — are all combined and condensed when we dream. In this piece, these different feelings about time — what time is, how we perceive time — are present, but not in a linear way: the way we experience it. Also, if you look at the way “NYx” is spelled, n and y are capitalized, so it gives us the possibility of an alternative interpretation, and brings connotations of New York. It’s the city of ultimate dreamers.

To continue Leonidas’s thought about silence: In our noisy, busy lives, sometimes we tend to be scared of these moments of solitude, of introspection, of silence, when

you are one-on-one with your true self. Yet those moments of facing and embracing are extremely important, because only then can we see where we are in life, what’s going on, what’s really happening under the surface.

KAVAKOS I have said many times, because I believe it, that the concert experience is the last opportunity for communion in silence that we have in our time. This is a situation where there are no preconditions. Religion doesn’t matter. Nationality doesn’t matter. Financial situation doesn’t matter. Personal situation doesn’t matter. Political views don’t matter. Everybody comes to listen, and to commune through the music. This, for me, is sacred.



The first page of the manuscript for Ms. Auerbach’s “NYx: Fractured Dreams.”



The work’s opening violin theme is engraved on this sculpture by Lera Auerbach.