

STATIONS OF MYCHAL

A NEW SONG CYCLE COMMEMORATING
THE LIFE, MINISTRY, AND DEATH OF
FDNY CHAPLAIN FR. MYCHAL JUDGE, OFM
"THE SAINT OF 9/11"



Kevin Salfen, composer | **Rick Davis**, librettist
Richard Novak, project conception, tenor
Ames Asbell, viola | **Joey M. Martin**, piano

Friday, September 4, 2026 | 7:00 p.m.
Van Cliburn Concert Hall | TCU

NOTES

This project began to take shape in the mind of tenor Richard Novak some five years ago, as a way to bring Father Mychal Judge's life – and the lessons it offers about the power of love, hope, faith, tolerance, courage, and joy – to the world in the form of a song cycle. The genre includes some of the greatest works in the vocal repertoire, by composers such as Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Mahler, Debussy, Ravel, Schönberg, Britten, Copland, Argento, and Barber. Contemporary composers have continued the form's vitality in a variety of musical styles, including works by Daron Hagen, Kim D. Sherman, Libby Larsen, John Muriello/David Gompper, Jason Robert Brown, Sandra Seaton/William Bolcom, Jennifer Higdon, Maria Schneider, and our own Kevin Salfen among others. As a way of bringing an individual voice to the stage, of exploring in depth a life, a journey, a set of preoccupations or a collection of images, the song cycle is perhaps unequaled in its aptness and malleability.

The process of developing *Stations of Mychal* began in earnest about three years ago, as Rick Novak began to assemble the creative team (composer, librettist, and performing ensemble) and further developed relationships with people who were close to Fr. Judge in various ways so that we might learn about him from people who knew him and witnessed his ministry. Some of these invaluable connections to Fr. Judge are listed at the end of our program notes along with other citations of more traditional bibliographic resources.

The structure of the cycle is inspired by the Christian tradition of the "Stations of the Cross," "Way of the Cross," or "Via Dolorosa" (Way of Suffering/Sorrow), marking the final passage of Christ to the cross. St. Francis of Assisi's writings helped codify and popularize the ritual reenactment of the Stations in churches and cathedrals worldwide. The Stations of the Cross have become an organizing principle in many art forms from medieval liturgical painting and drama to musical forms to modern drama. The structure offers an opportunity for reflection and contemplation of each step as well as a ritual, ceremonial template for forward motion as in a narrative.

Our song cycle does not literally recreate the Passion of Christ, but the form resonates with aspects of Mychal Judge's life that have been called Christ-like by numerous commentators, and gives a sense of "deep structure" to his journey, as each Station allows us to pause along the way for reflection and emotional expression – actions for which the human voice raised in song is particularly apt.

We thank you for being part of this journey and look forward to your responses to *Stations of Mychal*.

PROGRAM

I. BECOMING

Invocation

Kevin Salfen
(b.1975)

Family Pictures

At Pennsylvania Station

Ordination

II. FIRES

Demonsong

Dignity

Alvarado

Into the Fire

Vigil

III. WISDOM

Peacemaker (Omagh)

dedicated to Patti Ann and Conor McDonald

Trans World

in memory of Keenan Francis Novak

Meditation

The Last Homily (September 10, 2001)

8:50 a.m., 9/11/01

Dismissal

SPECIAL NOTES

The Franciscan robe worn by Richard Novak belonged to Fr. Benedict Taylor, OFT. Fr. Ben was a dear friend of Mychal's and was a professional Franciscan for 66 years/ priest for 60 years. We met Fr. Ben via Zoom, and he was thrilled about *Stations of Mychal*. Fr. Ben passed away on January 8, 2021. Thank you, Fr. Ben, for your life, ministry, and kindness. "Until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand."

The stole worn by Richard Novak is a replica of the stole Mychal Judge wore at the Mass on September 10, 2001. He would like to thank his wonderful mother, Ellen Novak, for making the stole.

The FDNY Bunker Coat and helmet worn by Richard Novak belongs to FDNY Fire Chaplain, Fr. Chris Keenan, OFM.

Libretto

To access the full libretto, please scan this QR code:



Find the full album of ***Stations of Mychal*** on Centaur, as a CD and available through all major streaming services.

Rick Davis (librettist) has written texts for two major works with composer Kim D. Sherman: an opera, *Love's Comedy*, based on an early play by Ibsen, and an oratorio, *The Songbird and the Eagle*, commissioned and premiered by San José Chamber Orchestra and The Choral Project in 2006 to critical acclaim, and revived in 2014. He adapted the text of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* for trio performance with Washington, DC's IN Series (2013, 2018), and created several opera translations and adaptations for Mason Opera Theater.

Rick is active in the field of translation for theater as well, with four published and produced plays by the Spanish Golden Age master Calderón de la Barca, and in collaboration with Brian Johnston, five Ibsen plays that have been published, anthologized, and widely produced in major regional theaters and universities. His translation of Calderón's *The Phantom Lady* won the Franklin Smith Prize in 2019. He has also written for *American Theatre* magazine, *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World*, *Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, and other publications.

As a stage director, he has directed plays and operas across the country, for venues including The Kennedy Center, Baltimore Center Stage, Theater of the First Amendment (where he served as Artistic Director for more than 20 years), Players Theater Columbus, Delaware Theater Company, Lake George Opera, Capital City Opera, Opera Idaho, the IN Series, and many more. Rick has worked at George Mason University in Virginia since 1991, and currently serves as Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts and Professor of Theater. He received his BA from Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, and his MFA and DFA from the Yale School of Drama.

Kevin Salfen (Associate Dean, College of the Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences; Professor of Music, University of the Incarnate Word) is an interdisciplinary artist, scholar, and producer. Major research interests include twentieth-century British music and Asian music in film and theater. Salfen has written a music appreciation e-textbook, *Pathways to Music* (Kendall-Hunt, 2nd ed., 2018), and his writing on film music and on Benjamin Britten has appeared in multiple academic journals and essay collections. He has presented papers at numerous academic conferences, including the national meeting of the American Musicological Society and the Society of Ethnomusicology, and he is past President of the American Musicological Society, Southwest Chapter. He curates and writes for the blog *SoundTrove*.

Salfen lived in England for a year and in Japan for almost two years, and he is a Company Member of international performing ensemble Theatre Nohgaku. With them he has performed traditional noh and newly written (shinsaku) noh throughout the U.S. and Japan. Salfen was executive producer of the multi-year performance and education project *Where Rivers Meet*, which brought together the classical noh *Sumida River*, Britten's *Curlew River*, and the newly commissioned *Song of the Yanaguana River* by 2015 Texas Poet Laureate Carmen Tafolla. He co-composed the intercultural dramatic work *In a Memory Palace*, which has received support from the National Endowment for the Arts, and which premiered in San Antonio and San Francisco in 2026.

Salfen's music has been performed in Asia, Europe, and throughout the U.S. He was a finalist for the ASCAP Young Composer Award, was nominated for the 2019 Artist Foundation of San Antonio People's Choice Award, has been recognized twice for his music by the American College Theater Festival, and has received multiple recognitions from The American Prize. Salfen's dramatic song cycle *Stations of Mychal*, for tenor, viola, and piano, about the life of Fr. Mychal Judge, has been released on the Centaur label.

Salfen has been executive producer for two documentary film projects – *Made in SA: New Performers*, *New Musicians* (2020) and *SA24: Two Dozen Songs from Now* (2021), and his film *Phoenix Fire*, which received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, was released in 2025. The score has been released on the Broadway Bird Records label. He is co-executive producer of the project *Opera Complex*, which allows users to explore contemporary operatic performance in a game-like virtual environment. It is scheduled for release in a pilot version in 2027.

Tenor, **Richard Novak**, has performed opera, oratorio, concerts, and recitals across the U.S., Italy, Germany, Thailand, Japan, Poland, Scotland, & Mexico. Novak's operatic credits include Rodolfo (La bohème), Pinkerton (Madama Butterfly), Alfredo (La traviata), Don José (Carmen), Nemorino (L'elisir d'amore), Ernesto (Don Pasquale), Werther (Werther), Eisenstein (Die Fledermaus), Tamino (Die Zauberflöte), Sam (Susannah), Lippo (Street Scene) and Roméo (Roméo et Juliette). Concert/oratorio work includes Beethoven (Symphony No. 9), Roger Henry (Remembrance), Peterson (Shadows and Light -North American premiere), Ramirez (Missa Criolla), Danielpour (An American Requiem), Salfen (Super Flumina Babylonis world-premiere), Kramer (Lux Caelestis world-premiere), Handel (Messiah), Beethoven (Missa Solemnis), Mozart (Davidde Penitente), Liszt (Christus), Brahms (Liebeslieder Waltzes), Schubert (Mass in G), Rossini (Petite Messe Solennelle), Mozart (Coronation Mass), Mendelssohn (Elijah), Mendelssohn (Lobgesang), Dubois (Seven Last Words of Christ).

Training programs included Chautauqua Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Wichita Grand Opera, the Wesley Balk Institute, and the Evelyn Lear/Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Program, and the UNT Crested Butte Early Music Festival. In 2005 & 2006, Novak won the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions (Tulsa District). In 2019, Novak made his Carnegie Hall debut singing a recital of songs by James Simon. Novak has been honored to premiere new music in recent years. He was the driving force behind the commission/creation of Kevin Salfen's dramatic song cycle Stations of Mychal in 2021 (recording released by Centaur Records in 2024), and premiered Dr. Mengele in Thomas Yee's Opera Eva and the Angel of Death in 2022.

Dr. Novak has held numerous leadership positions and won multiple honors including: President: NATS- South Texas Chapter, Chair: UMHB University Admissions & Recruiting Committee, Vice President/Auditions Chair: NATS- South Texas Chapter, Faculty Liaison for the Spencer-Lockett Scholarship Recital at Texas State University, Soloist with San Antonio Chamber Choir at ACDA, Top Male Apprentice: Chautauqua Opera, Winner: Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions (Tulsa), Winner: University of North Texas Concerto Competition, Winner: NATS Singer of the Year Competition (Texoma Region), 1st Recipient of the Bill Winspear Opera Endowment (University of North Texas), Stephen F. Austin State University President's Award (Best Recital), Stephen F. Austin State University Baumgartner Award (Top Senior).

Dr. Novak is also an active stage director, music director, and church musician. He has held church positions and conducted choirs in Texas, Oklahoma, Virginia, and Louisiana.

Dr. Novak holds a BM & MM in Vocal Performance from Stephen F. Austin State University and a DMA in Vocal Performance from the University of North Texas. Dr. Novak is currently an Adjunct Instructor of Voice at UNT where he teaches applied voice. In addition, Dr. Novak is also an Adjunct Instructor of Voice at TCU, where he teaches applied voice, lyric diction, and operatic literature. He has also taught at the Interharmony International Music Festival in Italy & Germany and the Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival in Alaska. Previous academic experience includes positions at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Texas State University, the University of the Incarnate Word, George Mason University, Oklahoma State University, the University of Louisiana-Monroe, and Angelina College. Upcoming performances include Stations of Mychal in Denton, Fort Worth, New York City (for the 25th Anniversary of 9/11), and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland. Dr. Novak is also the new Director of Music at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Fort Worth.

Dr. Novak lives in Fort Worth with his beautiful wife, amazing children, and a spoiled pointer-mix named Barley. He has 2 beautiful granddaughters who live too far away in Iowa. In his free time, he enjoys travelling, cooking, listening to Pavarotti, Sinatra, and Tony Bennett, making music with his family, and dreaming about playing a decent round of golf.

A dynamic and versatile artist-teacher, violist **Ames Asbell** has performed in nearly 40 countries around the globe, in venues ranging from rock festivals to Carnegie Hall. She has shared the stage and recording studio with artists such as David Byrne, The Chicks, Stevie Wonder, Andrea Bocelli, Harry Connick, Jr., Willie Nelson, Bernadette Peters, Sufjan Stevens, The Arcade Fire, Queens of the Stone Age, Rufus Wainwright, and many more. Her performances in a variety of musical genres appear on labels such as Nonesuch, Harmonia Mundi, Naxos, Sony, Centaur, and others, as well as in Richard Linklater's arthouse hit film *Waking Life* and nine episodes of PBS' *Austin City Limits*. She is a frequent presenter at conferences such as American String Teachers Association, American Viola Society Festival, College Music Society, Texas Music Educators Association, Music By Women, and others. Recent performances include International Viola Congresses in France, Brazil, Thailand, Poland, and New Zealand, and recitals in Scotland, South Korea, Japan, Mexico, and South Africa.

A passionate educator, is currently Professor of Viola at Texas State University. She creates an aspirational, supportive culture of achievement in her studio, and has mentored two high school violists who earned the top chair in Texas via TMEA All-State competition. In 2010, she founded the Texas State University String Project, leading it for over a decade into a vibrant program with 80 community students and 20 student teachers. In 2023, she established the annual Texas State ViolaFest, bringing students and teachers together for a day-long celebration of the viola.

Ames is founding violist for the Tosca String Quartet, Principal Violist of Austin Opera, and a member of the Austin Symphony Orchestra. She also performs regularly with the Arizona Musicfest, Philharmonie Austin (period performance), and Victoria (TX) Bach Festival orchestras. She previously performed with North Carolina Symphony, San Antonio Symphony, Breckenridge Music Institute, National Repertory Orchestra, and numerous regional orchestras across Texas and the Southeastern US.

A tireless advocate for the viola, Ames was elected to the board of the American Viola Society in 2016 and recently completed a three-year term as President. She is also a member of the Executive Boards of the International Viola Society and TexASTA.

Joey M. Martin (piano) is a musician regarded for his diverse musical interests, engaging artistry, and passionate enthusiasm for the choral art. After twenty years of service as the director of choral activities, Dr. Martin continues to service the Texas State School of Music as the interim director. Distinctions include recognition as a Favorite Professor recipient of the Presidential Distinction Awards for both Teaching and Service. During his time at Texas State, he has directed four of the seven university vocal ensembles. Highlights include engagements throughout much of Europe, South Africa, and China with performances for numerous conferences, including TMEA, SWACDA, ACDA, and the International Kodály Festival.

Dr. Martin served as the artistic director for the San Antonio based Alamo City Men's Chorale and with Craig Hella Johnson on the creative team for the Victoria Bach Festival. His scholarly/creative activities span twenty-seven of the United States and fifteen countries on six continents, including many western European countries, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Brazil. He continues in his twelfth year as the artistic director and conductor for Honor Choir USA in Honolulu, Hawai'i, as he shares the 'aloha spirit' with exceptional young musicians from the mainland.

As coach/accompanist, he enjoys collaborating with vocal and instrumental artists – vocalists Jennie Olson, Maria Jette, Timothy Jones, Ron Ulen, Daveda Karanas, Richard Novak, and Cheryl Parrish and with chamber musicians Ames Asbell, viola, and Karla Hamelin, cello.

Dr. Martin received his DMA in choral conducting from the University of Texas in Austin where he was recognized as The Outstanding Graduate while studying with Craig Hella Johnson (conducting), Betty Mallard (piano), and Martha Deatheridge (voice). He is a recent graduate of the Harvard School of Education Management Development Program and was recently selected to participate in the second cohort of the Texas Academic Leadership Academy. In his spare time, he dreams of culinary school.