



**Music at Kohl Mansion to present VIOLINS OF HOPE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA Jan-Feb 2020 – Collection of string instruments rescued from the Holocaust and restored will be featured in concerts and public events marking the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.**

**Music at Kohl Mansion has commissioned Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer to create new vocal/chamber work for Violins of Hope, supported by a Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.**

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**HI-RES IMAGES MAY BE DOWNLOADED HERE: <https://musicatkohl.org/for-press/>**

Burlingame, CA, November 14, 2017 - **Music at Kohl Mansion** - at 35 years, one of the San Francisco Peninsula's longest running and most distinguished music series - will produce a Bay Area-wide community initiative in January and February 2020 that will feature the ***Violins of Hope***, a collection of string instruments rescued from the Holocaust and restored by Israeli violinmakers **Amnon and Avshalom Weinstein**. Entitled ***Violins of Hope San Francisco Bay Area***, a variety of concerts and community events around the Bay Area will mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

As part of the project and with the support of a \$150,000 grant from the **William and Flora Hewlett Foundation**, Music at Kohl Mansion (**MAKM**) has commissioned American composer and Guggenheim Fellow **Jake Heggie** and librettist **Gene Scheer** to write a major chamber

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work for soprano, violin soloist and string quartet to be performed on instruments from the Violins of Hope collection. Each instrument has a unique and captivating story (chronicled by author **James A. Grymes** in *Violins of Hope: Violins of the Holocaust - Instruments of Hope and Liberation in Mankind's Darkest Hour*) that will be the source of inspiration for the new work. The commission will receive its world premiere on the Kohl stage and will be repeated in a variety of community concerts and events that make up the month-long *Violins of Hope San Francisco Bay Area* project.

Music at Kohl Mansion is selecting and coordinating a network of partner organizations for this in-depth celebration of the remarkable resilience of the human spirit. Among the organizations inspired to partner with MAKM for the project combining concerts, lectures, panel discussions, film screenings, broadcasts, exhibitions and education programs are (to date): **Consulate General of Israel to the Pacific Northwest; Congregation Emanu-El; Facing History and Ourselves; Grace Cathedral; InterMusic SF; Jewish Community Center East Bay; Jewish Community Center San Francisco; Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin & Sonoma Counties; Jewish Family and Children's Services Holocaust Center; KlezCalifornia; Mercy High School Burlingame; Osher Marin Jewish Community Center; Oshman Family Jewish Community Center; Peninsula Jewish Community Center; San Francisco Interfaith Council; Veretski Pass; Young Chamber Musicians; Under One Tent; America-Israel Cultural Foundation (NY); and Music of Remembrance, Seattle (WA)**. The list of community and organizational partners continues to expand.

The breadth of activities planned for *Violins of Hope San Francisco Bay Area* underscores MAKM's core belief that the arts strengthen communities. The project's impact will resonate throughout the Bay Area, and involve people of all faiths, ages, ethnicities, abilities, incomes and interests.

The distinguished ensembles and soloists who will perform the Heggie/Scheer premiere and play the Violins of Hope throughout the project will be announced at a later date. For more information, visit [www.musicatkohl.org](http://www.musicatkohl.org).

"Music at Kohl Mansion is honored to bring together a coalition of partners invested in sharing the powerful message of memory, justice, and healing symbolized by the Violins of Hope" says **Patricia Kristof Moy**, Music at Kohl Mansion Executive Director. "In response to the tragic re-occurrence of mass genocide and ethnic cleansing in today's world, this project will serve as a connector to many worlds: secular and religious, educational and artistic, activist, Jewish, Christian and multi-faith. We must constantly remember in order not to repeat the past. We are deeply honored to have been awarded a prestigious Hewlett 50 Commissions grant to give new voice to the historic Violins of Hope and carry their message into the future".

### **About the Music at Kohl Violins of Hope Presentations and World Premiere**

Music at Kohl Mansion's *Violins of Hope San Francisco Bay Area* is designed to take audiences on a reflective journey, reaffirming that the voiceless can indeed have a voice, using the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the camps as a reminder of the responsibility to never forget. Even during the Holocaust, music was a powerful and enduring source of comfort, hope and resistance that provides lessons now and for the future.

With the support of a \$150,000 Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions grant announced today, MAKM has commissioned Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer to write a major work for soprano, violin soloist and string quartet, which will be performed on instruments from the *Violins of Hope*

collection. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation is a nonpartisan, private charitable foundation that has been making grants to support the performing arts in communities across the San Francisco Bay Area for more than 50 years. The Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions, a five-year, \$8 million initiative celebrating the Foundation's 50th anniversary, will support the creation and premiere of new works by world-class performing artists in Bay Area communities. Music at Kohl Mansion is delighted to be an awardee in the first ten grants commissioning new works of music.

"What an absolute thrill and profound honor to be invited to craft a piece for these historic violins," says Jake Heggie. "This is a rare opportunity to bring people into a place of beauty and reflection to tell the harrowing, powerful and hopeful stories of these instruments - to give them a voice and make sure their stories of the Holocaust are not forgotten. This is easily one of the most challenging projects of my career and I have no doubt it will be one of the most rewarding. It will certainly push me creatively to find a deeper level of expression in my work. A new work of this scale is already a community event - but this one has a powerful international resonance. Though it will begin in the Bay Area, it promises to open up doorways and build bridges to schools, museums, as well as arts organizations far and wide. I am absolutely overjoyed at the opportunity."

A youth component of the Music at Kohl *Violins of Hope* project will provide middle and high school students exposure to the Violins and their history through visits by the Weinstein family and programming with project partners at Jewish Family & Children's Services Holocaust Center. Curriculum provided by Facing History and Ourselves forms the core of the syllabus. The *Violins of Hope* will be featured at various colleges and universities where history and music department faculty will be invited to collaborate. Live and delayed broadcasts as well as a commercial studio recording are expected to magnify exposure to this project on a local, regional and national scale.

### **The *Violins of Hope* Story and Collection**

For Jews enduring unimaginable evil during the Holocaust, music offered haven and humanity. The strains of a beloved song supplied solace, even if only for a few moments. In some cases, the ability to play the violin spared Jewish musicians from grueling labors or death. They literally played for their lives.

Nearly 50 years ago, Amnon Weinstein, an internationally renowned violin-maker in Tel Aviv, heard a story from a customer who brought in an instrument for restoration. The customer survived the Holocaust because his job was to play the violin while Nazi soldiers marched others to their deaths. When Weinstein opened the violin, he saw ashes inside.

Remembering the hundreds in his own family who perished in the Holocaust, he was overwhelmed and knew he needed to seek out and restore other stringed instruments with stories like this one, but could not bring himself to begin the project. But by 1996, Weinstein was ready. He put out a call and began locating violins that were played in the camps and ghettos. Word of Weinstein's work spread. Instruments were brought to his studio, where Amnon and his son Avshalom meticulously pieced each one back together.

The *Violins of Hope* collection now consists of more than 60 stringed instruments, each with its own story to tell. They have been played in concert halls, synagogues, churches, universities and other spaces in Jerusalem, Istanbul, Paris, London, Monte Carlo, Rome, Berlin, Charlotte,

Cleveland, Jacksonville Sarasota and most recently during the 2017 AIPAC conference in Washington, DC at the Library of Congress.

"Since the Shoah, when the Jewish cultural world was eradicated, I seek out the remaining sliver of culture: dusty violins in thousands of pieces, and I renew their lives as I repair and renovate them, piecing them together and cleaning them so that they may play their lively tunes once again," says Amnon Weinstein, violin-maker. "And even if the Jewish violinists have disappeared, I try to promise to them that their legacy will be born again as the notes are played."

Reached in Tel Aviv this week, the Weinstains sent the following message: "Expanding the world-wide *Violins of Hope* project to the West Coast is a dream we have had for years. We look forward to meeting audiences and communities in the Bay Area to share the stories these musical instruments tell. We are thrilled these stories will find new voices in the new chamber music piece commissioned for the project from composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer."

### **About Music at Kohl Mansion**

Now in its 35th year of presenting international touring ensembles in concert as well as award-winning education programs, MAKM serves 11,000 individuals seasonally. The Kohl for Kids music education programs have served over 100,000 San Mateo county public school students since their inception in 1992. MAKM also makes live music widely accessible through admission-free presentations at libraries, community centers, senior facilities and other public spaces. "We continuously seek ways to live our mission of community-building through music, demonstrating that art can act as a vehicle for common understanding" says Board President and Founder Liz Dossa.

### **About the Artists**

**Jake Heggie** is the composer of the operas *Dead Man Walking*, *Moby-Dick*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, *Great Scott*, *Three Decembers*, *Out of Darkness: Two Remain*, and the choral opera, *The Radio Hour*, among others. He has also composed nearly 300 songs, as well as chamber, choral and orchestral works. The operas - most created with writers Terrence McNally or Gene Scheer - have been produced on five continents. *Moby-Dick* (Scheer) was telecast throughout the United States as part of Great Performances' 40th Season and released on DVD (EuroArts). *Dead Man Walking* (McNally) has received nearly 50 international productions and has been recorded twice. *Three Decembers* has received nearly 20 international productions. The composer was recently awarded the Eddie Medora King prize from the UT Austin Butler School of Music, and the Champion Award from the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus. A Guggenheim Fellow, Heggie has served as a mentor for the Washington National Opera's American Opera Initiative and is a frequent guest artist at universities, conservatories and festivals throughout the USA and Canada. He and Gene Scheer are currently at work on *If I Were You*, based on the Faustian story by Julian Green, for the Merola Opera Program's 2019 season.

**Gene Scheer** has collaborated with Jake Heggie on many projects, including the 2010 Dallas Opera world premiere, *Moby-Dick*; *Three Decembers* (Houston Grand Opera; and the lyric drama *To Hell and Back* (Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra). Other works by Scheer and Heggie include *Camille Claudel: Into the Fire*, a song cycle premiered by Joyce di Donato and the Alexander String Quartet. Mr. Scheer worked as librettist with Tobias Picker on *An American Tragedy*, premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in 2005. Other collaborations include the lyrics for

Wynton Marsalis's *It Never Goes Away*. With the composer Steven Stucky, Mr. Scheer wrote the oratorio August 4, 1964, for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra which was nominated for a Grammy in 2012 for best classical composition. In 2015, Mr. Scheer collaborated with Joby Talbot on the opera *Everest*, based on the doomed 1996 Everest expedition. With Jennifer Higdon, Mr. Scheer wrote an operatic adaptation of *Cold Mountain*, premiered in 2015 at the Santa Fe Opera, winning the International Opera award in London for the best World premiere in 2015, as well as a Grammy nomination for best classical composition.

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For details about the Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions or to view the complete Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions press release, visit <https://www.hewlett.org/50Commissions/>.