

The Year of Silence

CHRISTOPHER CERRONE

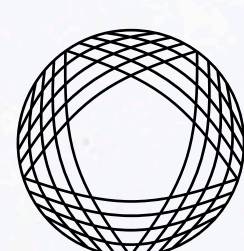
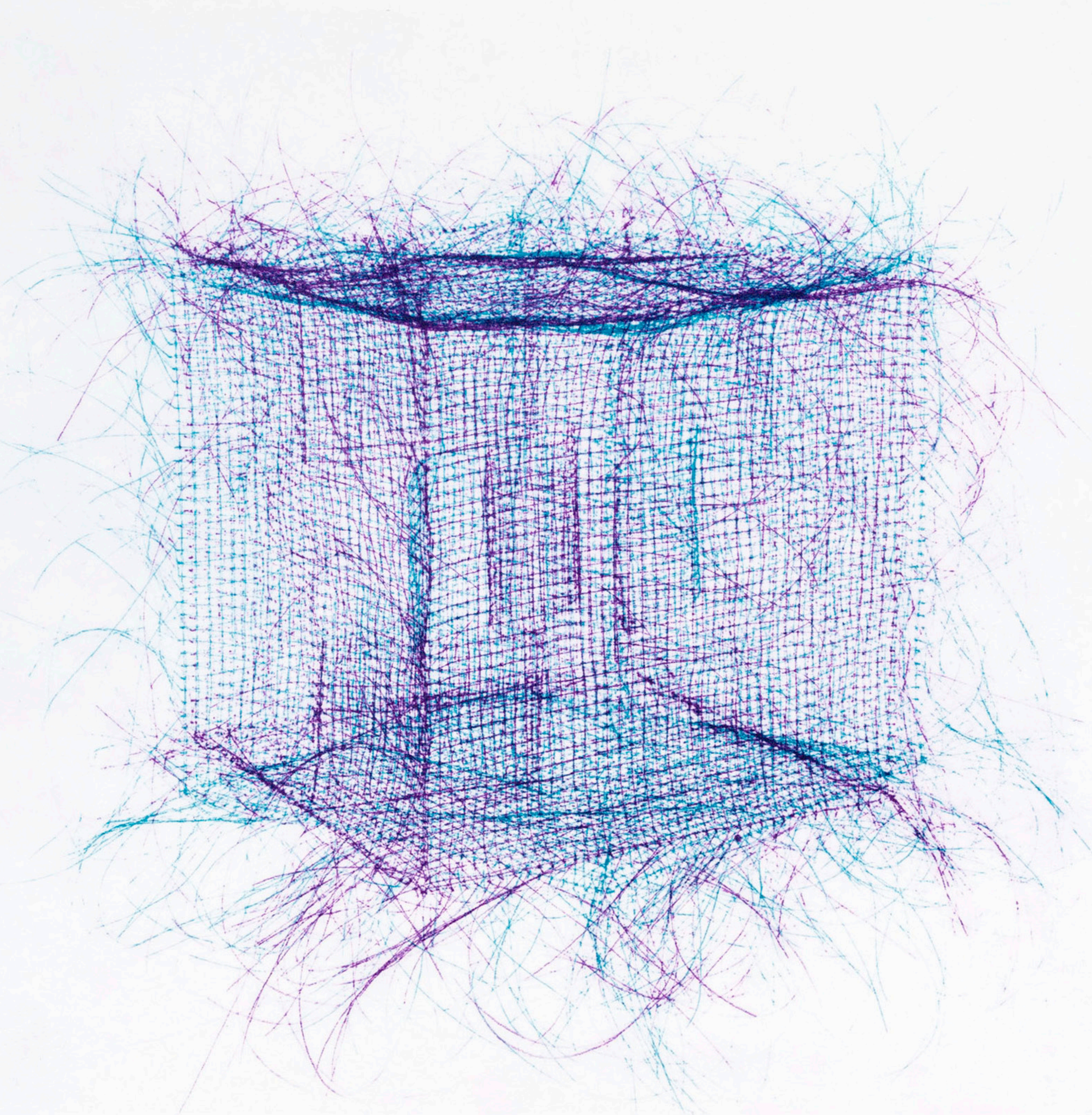
ANDREW NORMAN

LOUISVILLE ORCHESTRA

TEDDY ABRAMS

DASHON BURTON

JEFFREY KAHANE



PENTATONE

THE YEAR OF SILENCE

Christopher Cerrone, composer

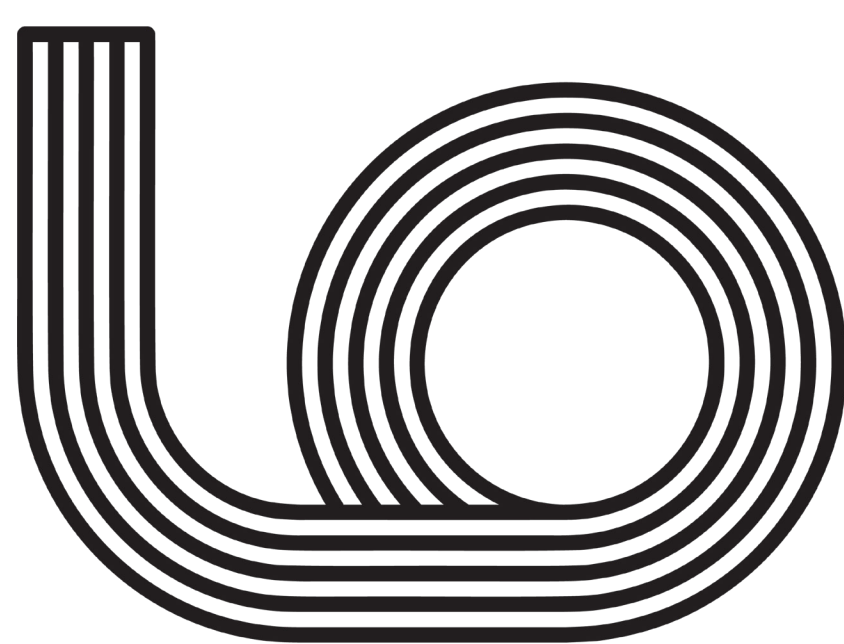
Andrew Norman, composer

Louisville Orchestra

Teddy Abrams, conductor

Dashon Burton, vocalist & narrator

Jeffrey Kahane, piano



**LOUISVILLE
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THE YEAR OF SILENCE

Christopher Cerrone (b. 1984)

The Year of Silence

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | Shortly after two in
the afternoon | 3. 10 |
| 2 | He put the pill bottle
back | 3. 18 |
| 3 | There was another silence | 3. 11 |
| 4 | Who was the first person | 3. 46 |
| 5 | The silence was plain
and rich and deep | 1. 53 |
| 6 | Shortly after nine a.m. | 2. 05 |
| 7 | The cryptographer's
theory | 4. 14 |
| 8 | Every day the silence
receded | 1. 23 |

Andrew Norman (b. 1979)

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|--------|
| 9 | Split | 27. 03 |
| | Total playing time: | 50. 09 |

Louisville Orchestra

Teddy Abrams, conductor

Dashon Burton, vocalist & narrator

Jeffrey Kahane, piano

Christopher Cerrone
Photo by Jacob Blickenstaff



I stumbled on Kevin Brockmeier's "The Year of Silence" in a copy of *The Best American Short Stories* at a friend's house in Brooklyn in 2010. The story—about a city that went mysteriously silent for a year—was told in the first person plural by a mysterious "we," which made it feel ancient and disembodied, like a Greek chorus. Its combination

of a fantastical world with a sense of inexorable architecture strongly appealed to my sensibilities.

It reminded me of another of my favorite authors, Italo Calvino, whose novel *Invisible Cities* I adapted into my first opera.

But, after a bit of thought, I just couldn't see what music would add to the story. It felt so complete in its structure and sweep that I discarded the idea of a musical adaptation.

Fast forward to April 2020, and I'm sitting in my Brooklyn apartment.

It's the earliest, most uncertain part of the Covid-19 pandemic.

That time, for me, combined dread and boredom. During the day, I would wander the silent streets of Flatbush, my neighborhood that is rarely, if ever, quiet, and at night I would scroll through my books and archives, the only noise being that of ambulances rushing through the streets.

In my scrolling, I found the file: the_year_of_silence_all_pages.pdf. What read before as a foray into a whimsical world now felt prophetic. At that moment, I knew that I had to find a way to adapt it.

I emailed the story to my friend and collaborator Teddy Abrams.

I was less soliciting a gig and more looking for confirmation from a friend whose opinion I trusted.

He wrote me back a day later suggesting that we make it into a piece as soon as possible and premiere it in Louisville.

Reading the story again, I decided that the kind of draconian cuts required to make the piece into a song cycle were neither dramatically appropriate nor structurally sound, and so I chose a way to include a maximum amount of text: to use a narrator, who occasionally sings. For this part, I suggested an old friend, Dashon Burton, who has not only a beautiful baritone voice but a sonorous speaking one, too.

“As soon as possible,” given all the twists and turns of the pandemic, turned out to be three years later—pretty fast by classical music standards. I began writing the piece in December 2022, a few months after our American president declared the pandemic over. I wanted to capture a range of conflicting emotions: the desire to remember, the desire to forget, and the need to find meaning in a difficult time.

Instead, I let go of all my preconceived notions of what I wanted the piece to be and just wrote. I was guided entirely by the text of the story, which is so rich that it did not need any politicizing or historicizing. The story of humans becoming obsessed and fascinated and eventually bored with the mysteries of the world is a deeper and older story than any specific moment.

I used a prepared piano, strings scratching their strings, and brass

players blowing air throughout their instruments to turn the orchestra into the noise of a construction site. I asked all the percussion to play freely and ignore the conductor to evoke the sound of Morse code in the distance.

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The hardest thing to evoke in the music was the silence, which I interpreted not as a literal lack of sound, but as a kind of warm, sustained world that envelops the listener the way the silence does in the story.

The Year of Silence was commissioned by the Louisville Symphony, Teddy Abrams, music director, and was created with the support of a residency from the Stiftung Laurenz-Haus in Basel, Switzerland.

Christopher Cerrone



Teddy Abrams
Photo by Lauren Desberg

The Louisville Orchestra is honored to present an album of two modern masterpieces: Andrew Norman's piano concerto *Split* and Christopher Cerrone's *The Year of Silence*. Both works investigate and confront the frenetic nature of life in the 21st century, and each piece offers a meditative answer to the challenges of navigating the noise and distraction of contemporary culture.

Prophetically, *Split* (written in 2015) offers a musical portrait of our current media landscape, closely resembling a TikTok scrolling experience, where the solo pianist (like a Petrushka-esque puppet) is forcibly pulled in numerous directions based on percussive cues provided by the orchestra. One feels both the excitement and the anxiety of this onslaught of content, with moments of chaos yielding to sequences of exuberance, playfulness, and humor. Finally, a vision of baroque beauty and relaxation ultimately overtakes the channel-surfing, as if reminding us that the music of the spheres can ultimately be heard through the noise we make.

The Year of Silence, based on a short story by Kevin Brockmeier, was composed for “singing narrator” and orchestra, offering a Twilight Zone-style allegory about our quest for stillness amidst the counterpoint of urban life. The story tells of a city that experiences

random moments of absolute silence, which feel like rapturous interventions to the town's inhabitants. These mysterious silent blips are so profound that the community restructures in pursuit of silence, essentially worshipping the concept of quietness itself. Cerrone sets the text of the story in a virtuosic, rhythmic delivery by the narrator, which provides a taught, intense illumination of the tale and its deeper meaning. The orchestration is immensely creative and dynamic, presenting a cinematic vision of a world re-evaluating its relationship to its soundscape. Like *Split*, the story (and the music) find transcendence and balance amidst upheaval and change.

Writing topical and relevant music is very challenging. Many attempts, no matter how well-intentioned, fail in superficiality or obsolescence. The two compositions on this album succeed because fundamentally they are exceptional, engaging,

cohesive works of art aside from their social commentary. The works' allegories are subtextual and aesthetic. Indeed, the genius of Andrew Norman and Christopher Cerrone is that they have intuited, absorbed, and expressed the nature of life today in a manner that leaves the audience with a part to play. We aren't told what or how to think by these two composers, but are instead offered musical simulacra for our confounding modern world, with glimpses of regeneration and reconstitution that would be wise to consider.

Teddy Abrams



Andrew Norman & Teddy Abrams
Photo by O'Neil Arnold

Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM

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& Teddy Abrams**

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Silence & Split*

& Mix engineer for *Split*

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Mix engineer for *The Year of Silence*

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Mastering engineer

Alan Silverman

Design

Marjolein Coenrady (PENTATONE)

Cover art

Jayoung Yoon

Emptiness of Form 03.2018

Product management & design

**Ana Milovanović & Karolina
Szymanik** (PENTATONE)

The Year of Silence was recorded on May 12 and 13, 2023 in the Whitney Hall at the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts, Louisville, KY, US.

Split was recorded on May 9 and 10, 2025 in the Whitney Hall at the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts, Louisville, KY, US.

Based on the story "The Year of Silence" by Kevin Brockmeier, © 2008 Kevin Brockmeier; adapted with permission of the author

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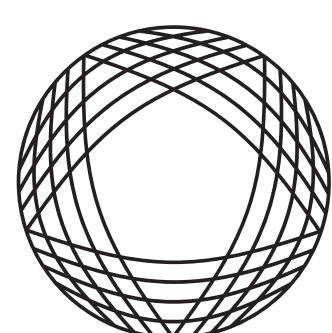
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