

A man in silhouette is kneeling on the right side of the frame, looking towards a wooden chair on the left. A bright spotlight illuminates the chair and the floor around it, creating a strong contrast with the dark background. The man's face is partially visible in profile, looking intently at the chair.

# **Songs for Murdered Sisters**

## **Joshua Hopkins**

**Poetry by Margaret Atwood**  
**Music by Jake Heggie**



*Songs for Murdered Sisters* is dedicated  
to the memory of

**Nathalie, Carol, Anastasia,  
Pat Lowther and Debbie Rottman**

**SONGS FOR MURDERED SISTERS (2020)**  
**Poetry by Margaret Atwood**  
**Music by Jake Heggie**

1	Empty Chair - Enchantment	3. 55
2	Anger	3. 46
3	Dream	3. 47
4	Bird Soul	4. 05
5	Lost	3. 48
6	Rage	4. 40
7	Coda: Song	3. 18

Total playing time: 27. 22

**Joshua Hopkins**, baritone  
**Jake Heggie**, piano





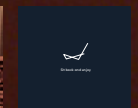
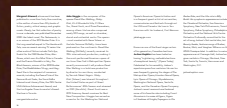
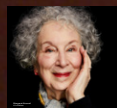
Joshua Hopkins  
© Simon Pauly

My sister Nathalie Warmerdam was murdered by her ex-boyfriend Basil in September 2015. Two other women, Carol Culleton and Anastasia Kuzyk, were murdered by the same man on the same morning, both having had relationships with Basil in the past. I felt helpless. This tragedy devastated my family and the entire community in which I grew up. It also opened my eyes to the worldwide epidemic of gender-based violence. When the initial shock subsided, I felt compelled to use my voice to tell my sister's story through the power of music and poetry. With the guidance and financial support of Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra and Houston Grand Opera, my aspiration to develop a major new song cycle addressing gender-based violence became a reality. The exceptional creative team of Jake Heggie and Margaret Atwood answered my call to social activism, delving deep into their own personal experiences.

I often found myself feeling numb about Nathalie's death — something too horrifying to comprehend. Since receiving Margaret's haunting words and then Jake's gorgeous music, I have shed countless tears. The words and music, in their own separate ways and woven together, have opened a portal to my heart, connecting me to complicated emotions that were lying dormant under all the layers of self-protection and denial. This work has provided meaning for me, transforming my grief into something palpable.

*Songs for Murdered Sisters* is a tribute to Nathalie, Carol and Anastasia and the countless sisters we have lost over the years. If these songs can awaken the heart of someone who does not yet recognize the gravity of this epidemic, or motivate someone to do their part, take action and perhaps save someone from a similar plight, then I may truly hope to honor my sister's memory.

**Joshua Hopkins**

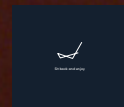
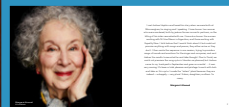






I met Joshua Hopkins and heard his story when we were both at Glimmerglass, he singing and I speaking. I have known two women who were murdered, both by jealous former romantic partners, so the killing of his sister resonated with me. I have also known the women working with Ni Una Menos in Argentina, and those working with Equality Now. I told Joshua that I would think about it but could not promise anything: with songs and poems, they either arrive or they don't. I then wrote the sequence in one session, trying to provide a range of moods and emotions for the singer and composer, and sent Joshua the results to see what he and Jake thought. Due to Covid, we could not premiere the song cycle in Houston as planned, but Joshua came to my backyard in September and gave us a recital ... it was very moving. It's been a total pleasure and privilege to work with Josh and Jake on this cycle. I made the "sisters" plural because they are indeed — unhappily — very plural. Sisters, daughters, mothers. So many.

**Margaret Atwood**

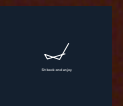
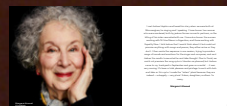




It was November of 2016 when Joshua Hopkins told me the harrowing story of his sister's murder and invited me to join him in finding a way to share that story through song. He felt it was essential to use his voice as a singer and a man to tell her story; to do his part in waking people up to the massive worldwide tragedy of violence against women. To wake them up to their part in it. About a year later, conversations with the great Margaret Atwood ensued. She asked many questions about the shape and direction of the piece. What is the journey of the cycle? Who is Josh in that journey? I shared my concept of the piece as something similar to Schubert's epic song-cycle *Winterreise* ("Winter's Journey") with Josh as a wanderer. He walks through the world wondering how to make sense of this event and put the pieces together, filled with grief and rage, on a quest for connection and transformation. Something clicked, and in early 2018, Margaret sent her perfect, complete set of 8 texts and asked "How about something like this?" Josh and I were stunned and deeply moved. I am in complete awe of Margaret's genius — and it was a great honor and privilege to explore every corner of her poems to shape this musical, emotional journey for Josh. I finished setting the songs for voice and piano in February 2020, and orchestrated them a month later. It is our hope that many voices will take up the call of these songs in the future — men's and women's voices all over the world.

**Jake Heggie**

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**Margaret Atwood**, whose work has been published in more than forty-five countries, is the author of more than fifty books of fiction, poetry, critical essays, and graphic novels. *Dearly*, her first collection of poetry in over a decade, was published November 2020. Her latest novel, *The Testaments*, is a co-winner of the 2019 Booker Prize. It is the long-awaited sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, now an award-winning TV series. Her other works of fiction include *Cat's Eye*, finalist for the 1989 Booker Prize; *Alias Grace*, which won the Giller Prize in Canada and the Premio Mondello in Italy; *The Blind Assassin*, winner of the 2000 Booker Prize; *The MaddAddam Trilogy*; and *Hag-Seed*. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, the Franz Kafka International Literary Prize, the PEN Center USA Lifetime Achievement Award, and the *Los Angeles Times* Innovator's Award. She lives in Toronto.

[margaretatwood.ca](http://margaretatwood.ca)

**Jake Heggie** is the composer of the operas *Dead Man Walking*, *Moby-Dick*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, *If I Were You*, *Great Scott*, and *Three Decembers*, among others. He has also composed nearly 300 songs, as well as chamber, choral and orchestral works. The operas – most created with Gene Scheer or the late Terrence McNally – have been produced on five continents. *Dead Man Walking* (McNally) recently received its 70th international production, making it the most-performed American opera of our time. New York's Metropolitan Opera recently announced it will produce *Dead Man Walking* in a bold new production by director Ivo van Hove, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin. *Moby-Dick* (Scheer) was telecast throughout the United States as part of Great Performances' 40th Season and released on DVD (EuroArts). *Great Scott* was a 2019 Grammy Award nominee for Best New Composition. 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 lives in San Francisco with his husband, Curt Branom.

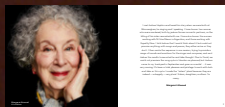
[jakeheggie.com](http://jakeheggie.com)

Known as one of the finest singer-actors of his generation, Canadian baritone

**Joshua Hopkins** has been hailed as having "a glistening, malleable baritone of exceptional beauty." (Opera Today) Celebrated for his versatility, Joshua's repertoire spans four centuries. He can be seen frequently gracing the stages of The Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Glyndebourne, Washington National Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and the Canadian Opera Company. Joshua's recent seasons have featured some of his favorite roles including Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Papageno in *Die*

*Zauberflöte*, and the title role in *Billy Budd*. His symphonic appearances include the Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Toronto Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, and the National Arts Centre Orchestra. Profoundly committed to the art of song, Joshua's first recital disc, *Let Beauty Awake*, features songs of Barber, Bowles, Glick, and Vaughan Williams on the ATMA Classique label. In addition to various appearances at Carnegie Hall, Joshua has given recitals in Chicago, Montreal, New York, Santa Fe, Toronto, Vancouver and Washington, D.C.

[joshuahopkins.com](http://joshuahopkins.com)



## Acknowledgments

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*This album was recorded at **Skywalker Sound**, a Lucasfilm Ltd. company, Marin County, California, USA, from October 27-29, 2020.*

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*Songs for Murdered Sisters* was co-commissioned by Houston Grand Opera and Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra.

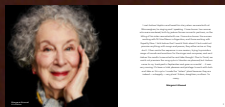
Margaret Atwood's poems for *Songs for Murdered Sisters* are in the collection *Dearly*, published by HarperCollins US, Penguin Random House UK and Penguin Random House Canada. Copyright © Margaret Atwood 2020. All rights reserved.

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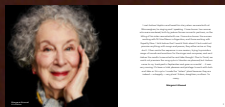
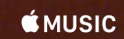






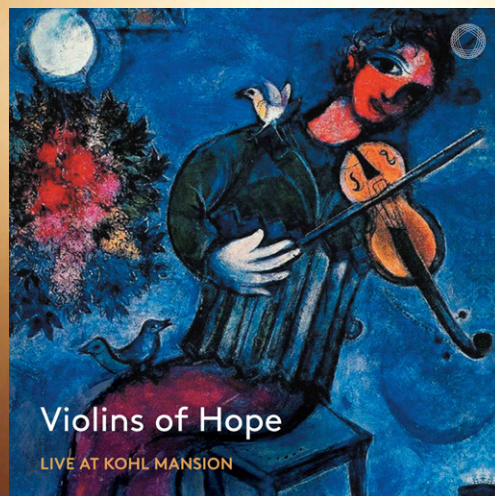


Sit back and enjoy





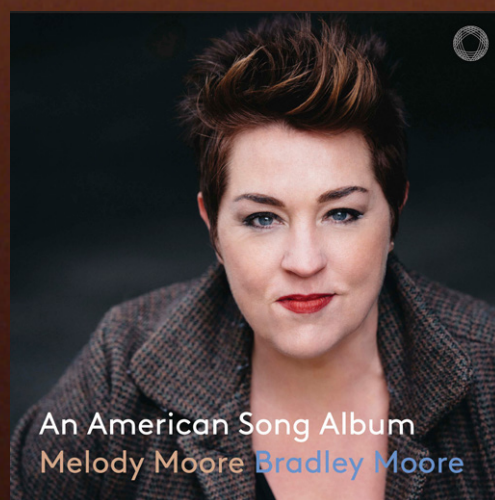
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