

Participants' Guide for "What a Stranger May Know" Brown University

On April 16th 2007 from 7:25-9:50 A.M. EST there was a terrible event at Virginia Tech. 33 human beings were killed (the gunman shot 32 members of his community and then himself). Many more people were wounded. Five years later, we memorialize the losses of the murdered.

On April 16th 2012 from 7:25-9:50 A.M. EST, 27 actors/performers/people will read Erik Ehn's memorial "What a Stranger May Know." There is one altar written for each of the 32 individuals who was killed by the gunman on that morning. We will hear 27 of the altars. They will be read simultaneously on the fifth anniversary, in conjunction with similar readings at campuses across the country and in Northern Ireland.

Plays have also been written contemplating the gunman's actions, but they are going to be taken up separately. Each performer will read one altar. Altars are 30+ pages of free verse, narration, facts and reflection on the victim. 27 performers will read simultaneously on Lincoln Green.

Silent Witness

We are looking for one silent witness for each of the 27 altars. Please send anyone who could do this to us. Sylvia Ann Soares describes this contribution as: "Each Altar has 1 Silent Witness who sits the entire time focused within the event. The Silent Witness is a powerful presence. They represent all those who are not able to be present, and they will represent the message and essence of the gathering to others in future. They are the bridge between the seen and the unseen, between the audible and the inner voice, a spiritual anchor. Those who become Silent Witness are aware of their significant being. They are aware of the energy that feeds and emanates from all life, seen and unseen. They are aware of the power in the affirming energy that they emanate, that they

bring to the memorial.”

Dates and Times:

Event will be on Monday April 16, 7:25-9:50 A.M. EST

Rehearsals will be on the weekend of April 14 & 15: Saturday April 14 from 11-4 Sunday April 15 from 11-2

Location:

- Event--Lincoln Green on the campus of Brown University (south of Waterman Street & east of the main green of campus)

- Rain and Rehearsal locations TBA. **Directors:**

There are four directors—Amy Lynn Budd, Erik Ehn, Connie Crawford and Sylvia Ann Soares. Each director will work with 6-7 performers. Directors will be in touch directly with performers.

Approaching the text:

We call each piece an altar. We are reading 27 altars. Within each altar there are 32 “plays.” The plays are composed of component parts that repeat and revise.

Sylvia Ann Soares wrote this after reading one of the altars, “My first impression was that I wanted to breathe these words in, allow them to permeate and cycle within and exhale them, speaking, singing them in memoriam.”

Speak what is in the brackets, but not in the parentheses; e.g., “Kuse,” would be spoken, but not description of movement.

Structure of Piece:

There is one altar for each person. Each altar has 32 plays within it. There are four sections of 8 plays.

The first 8 plays have movements in each:

1. traveling song
2. language
3. name
4. silence

5. motion
6. kuse*
7. story
8. prayer

*In Noh terms, the Kuse is where the singing and dancing come together in an extensive and expressive way (along with numerous other details of poetic form!)... But for our purposes – it's meant to be a place where there may be more developed movement (than in the "movement" section) and lyrical intent (if not sung melody). So it's as if the vocal and physical elements of the play at that point marry and come together for a bit.

Plays 9-16 will be performed as a song in the round. Performer #1 begins alone. When they reach the line "Don't waste my time," performer #2 begins their text. When performer #2 reaches "Don't waste my time," performer #3 begins their text, etc. All performers will be assigned a number for the order of this sequence. This text will be repeated 8 times.

Plays 17-24 are stories.

Plays 25-32 are long versions of the movements from the first 8 plays. For example, Play 25 is a Traveling Song, play 26 language...

Please Bring a Rock:

We ask that each performer find a rock and write the name of the person they are commemorating on the rock. The rock will sit in front of you as you read.

Description of Project from Erik Ehn:

"We are working very closely with Virginia Tech, in full gentleness."

"Dear All:

As some of you may know, I've been working on a commemorative project around the 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech. The core of the memorial is 32 plays, one for each of the people killed by the shooter (who is remembered in a separate series of plays). The 32 scripts are meant to be played simultaneously, in a large open space; much of the text loops, occasionally all 32 pieces sync up. There's a substantial amount of music. The audience is invited to walk through the language; a garden in text.

My hope is to collaborate with college campuses around the country to present the piece on the morning of April 16 2011, the fifth anniversary of the event.

The project can be done with minimal rehearsal, as a reading, or with substantial rehearsal. However it's done, we create interlocking circles of fellowship-in-contemplation. At minimum, the project asks for 27 readers, who could be given a set of basic instructions the day of the presentation that would help with issues of timing. Moving up a scale of collaborative energy - the 27 pieces could also add a witness-one who sits with the reader as auditor. Beyond this, live music could be added. Each play also includes dance or movement; these sequences are un-choreographed at this point, and it is imagined that they will be developed at the participating schools.

The title of the piece is "What a Stranger May Know." The material is drawn from the public record; what is the space of civic mourning? The language attempts to give our empathy (our compassionate reasoning) a particular job, given the giant obstacles to detailed knowing.

Much peace,
E"

Sylvia Ann Soares responded this way to the idea of the project:

"Quite a collaboration. A beautiful ritual of compassion. I

was taken by the words/text. The title of the piece is "What a Stranger May Know." Author Erik Ehn says: 'The material is drawn from the public record; what is the space of civic mourning? *The language attempts to give our empathy (our compassionate reasoning) a particular job, given the giant obstacles to detailed knowing.*'

"I splurge on a Buddhist periodical now and then. Recently, I picked up the Fall 2011 issue of The Buddhist Review Tricycle. In an interview with American monk Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, who founded the Buddhist Global Relief just after 2007, challenged Buddhists: 'I know we engage in lofty meditations on kindness and compassion and espouse beautiful ideas of love and peace. But, note that we pursue them largely as inward, subjective experiences geared toward personal transformation. Too seldom does this type of compassion roll up its sleeves and step into the field.'

"Utilizing the gift of creativity in stepping into the field with this huge collaborative theatrical ritual evokes awareness, emits powerful transformative healing energy to the victim's families and friends, and strengthens the potential for further acts of compassion among participants and audience. "What a Stranger May Know" suggest global empathy among witnesses of travesty. We are entering an era of compassion as Neptune transits Pisces from Feb 4, 2012 to 2026. Lots of time and Universal assistance in learning to love and help one another and life itself."