

ANSWER MACHINE TAPE, 1987

Philip Venables (composer)

Zubin Kanga (pianist) // Ted Huffman (dramatist)

Duration 45' - 60'

This major new work for piano and multimedia by **Philip Venables**, created in collaboration with dramatist Ted Huffman and pianist Zubin Kanga, focuses on New York visual artist David Wojnarowicz (pictured, below in his *Self-Portrait* (1984)), and the turbulent period leading up to the death Peter Hujar, his close friend and fellow artist, from AIDS-related illness in 1987. It uses a transcription of Wojnarowicz's answering machine tape in the days leading up to Hujar's death, featuring calls from Hujar, other artists, friends and lovers, to explore not just his life, but that period of the New York art scene, queer history and the AIDS crisis.

Layers of text and narrative will be woven into a musical fabric, with messages on the tape transformed into character studies. Using new sensor technology from the Augmented Instruments Lab, the piano will function not just as an acoustic instrument, but as a typewriter to transcribe sections of tape onto the screen, as well as a controller to add electronic sound and light, combining in an integrated solo multimedia performance. The result will be a powerful and poignant work that reflects on queer history and what it is to be a queer person today.



This project will be the fourth in series of pieces centring around queer oral histories, and the seventh collaboration between Philip Venables and Ted Huffman, including their award-winning operas *4:48 Psychosis* (2016) and *Denis and Katya* (2019). It will also be Philip Venables' first major work for solo piano.

Philip Venables (pictured, with Ted Huffman) has been described as “an arrestingly original musical personality” by Alex Ross in *The New Yorker* and as “one of the finest composers around” by the *Guardian*. His output covers opera, music theatre, multimedia concert works, chamber music and song, an eclectic range of styles and influences, and themes often concerning social politics, violence, gender and storytelling.

Philip's most recent opera *Denis & Katya* (Opera Philadelphia, Music Theatre Wales, Opéra Orchestre National Montpellier), with director/dramatist Ted Huffman, won the 2019 Fedora Generali Prize for Opera and was dubbed “an intimate, haunting triumph” by the *New York Times*. His first opera, *4.48 Psychosis* (Royal Opera) won a 2016 UK Theatre Award, a 2017 Royal Philharmonic Society Award and a 2017 British Composer Award, and was nominated for an Olivier Award and Sky Arts South Bank Award. The opera has been seen in the UK, Germany, France and the USA, and was called “a new brand of opera” by the *Times*.



Philip's debut album *Below the Belt* was released in 2018 and described by BBC Music Magazine as “unmissable”. He was a MacDowell Fellow with director Ted Huffman in 2017. He is a director of the agency Bright Ivy Ltd. His work is published exclusively by Ricordi.

www.philipvenables.com

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American director **Ted Huffman** made his Royal Opera debut in 2016 directing the world premiere of Philip Venables's *4.48 Psychosis* (winner of the 2016 UK Theatre Award for Achievement in Opera). Previous work at the Royal Opera House includes *The Lighthouse* for English Touring Opera, *Most of the Boys* for Sasha Siem with Zack Winokur and *Macbeth* for Glyndebourne Festival, for which he also wrote the libretto.

Huffman was born in New York and studied at Yale University. He was an apprentice on San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Programme and at the Watermill Center, and has gone on to work for opera companies around the world. Credits include *Svadba* (Aix-en-Provence Festival) with Winokur, *Eugene Onegin* (Theater an der Wien in der Kammeroper), *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (La Monnaie, Brussels, Dutch National Opera and Aix-en-Provence and Aldeburgh festivals), *Orphée aux enfers* (Opéra national de Lorraine), and *La Calisto* and *Galileo, Galilei* (Cincinnati Opera). He has also created concert stagings of *Die Dreigroschenoper* for the London Philharmonic Orchestra with Vladimir Jurowski and *La cambiale di matrimonio* for the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra with Nicholas McGegan.

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