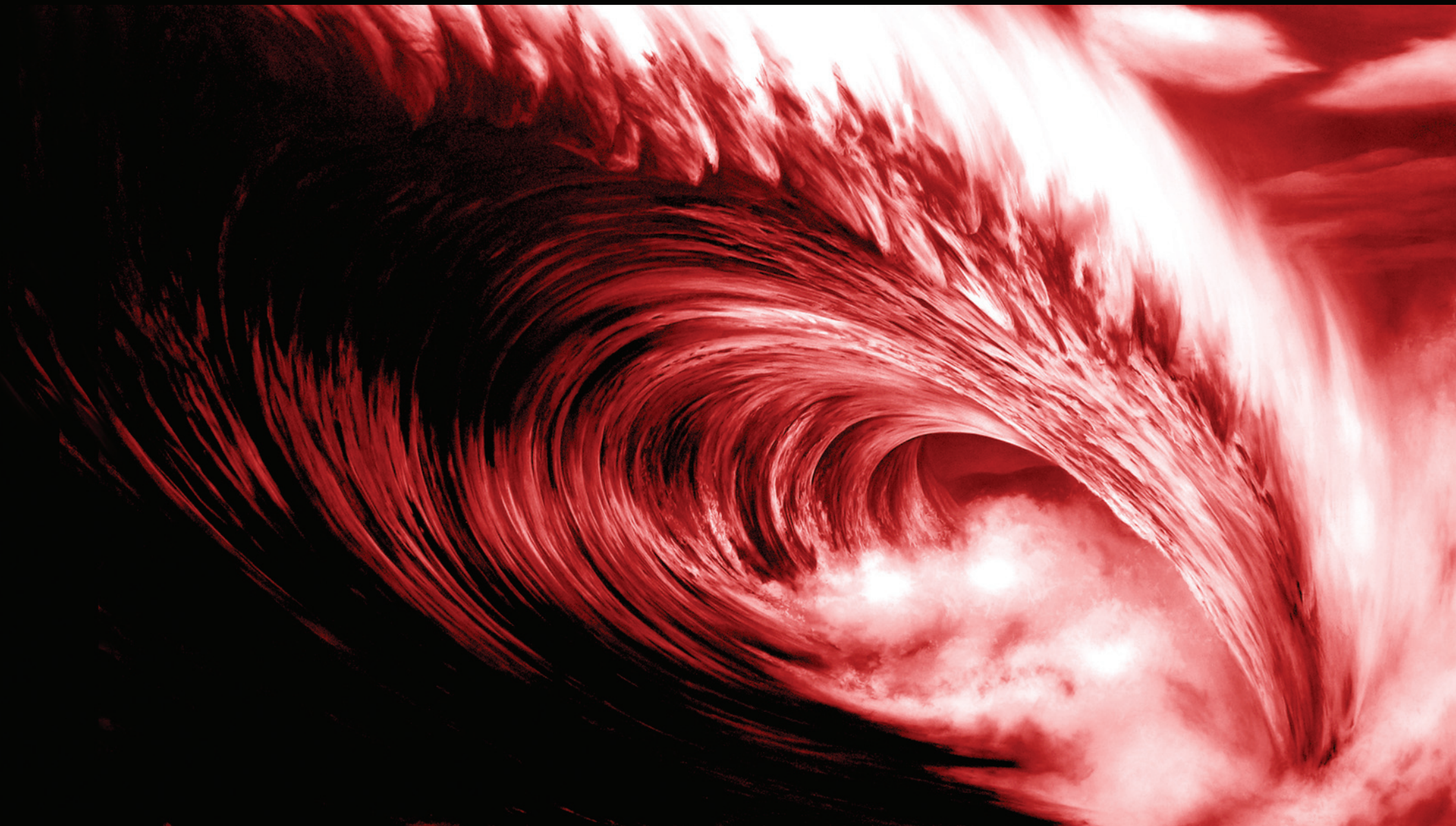
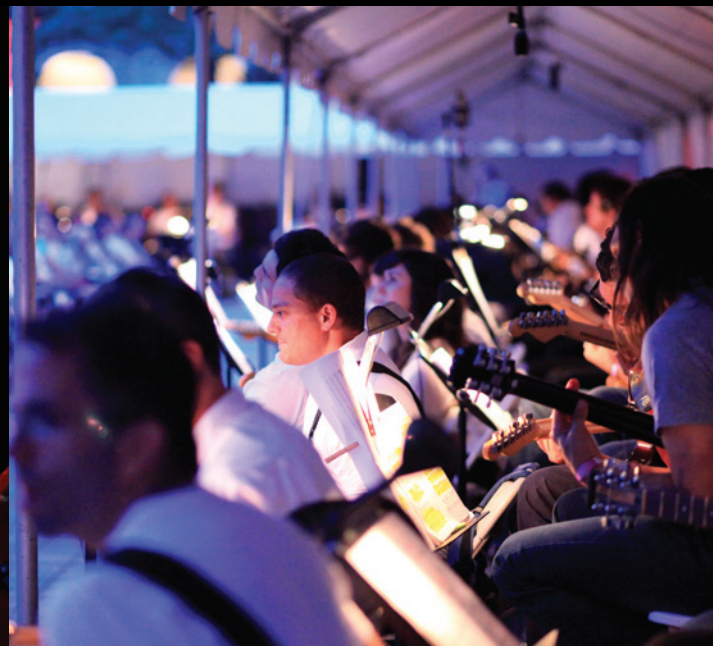


RHYS CHATHAM

A CRIMSON GRAIL





A CRIMSON GRAIL

***Outdoor Version (2008) for 200 electric guitars,
16 electric basses, and percussion***

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3



RHYS CHATHAM is a composer, guitarist, and trumpet player from Manhattan, currently living in Paris. He was the founder of the music program at The Kitchen in downtown Manhattan in 1971 and was its music director between 1971–73 and 1977–80. While at The Kitchen he was responsible for programming more than 250 concerts of living composers including the New Music / New York festival, which was the prototype upon which the New Music America festival was later based. Chatham studied under, was influenced by, or has collaborated with Maryanne Amacher, Don Cherry, Tony Conrad, Jon Hassell, Charlemagne Palestine, Eliane Radigue, Terry Riley, Frederic Rzewski, Morton Subotnick, Serge Tcherepnin, and La Monte Young, among many others.

With Rhys Chatham's composition *Guitar Trio* (1977) he became the first composer to make use of multiple electric guitars in special tunings to merge the extended-time music of the '60s and '70s with serious hard rock. Chatham continued this pursuit over the next decade, culminating in 1989 with the composition and performance of his first symphony for an orchestra of one hundred electric guitars, *An Angel Moves Too Fast to See*.

In 2005, Rhys Chatham was commissioned by the city of Paris to compose a work for large electric guitar orchestra to be premiered at the basilica of Sacré-Coeur during the all-night arts festival Nuit Blanche. This new guitar orchestra, entitled *A Crimson Grail*, was written to work with the specific architecture of the basilica, making use of its natural fifteen-second reverberation time. The musi-

cians surrounded the audience, creating an antiphonal effect with the sound moving around the space from area to area. Scored for as many as four hundred guitarists, the piece was premiered by an orchestra of approximately 125 musicians; it was a fantastic success.

In late 2007 Lincoln Center Out of Doors and Wordless Music invited Rhys Chatham to mount *A Crimson Grail* in New York at the 2008 Lincoln Center Out of Doors festival. The composition had to be completely reworked for the acoustics of an exterior, non-reverberant setting. In 2008, Lincoln Center commissioned the writing of an outdoor version of *A Crimson Grail* for this performance.

A Crimson Grail (outdoor version) is approximately 60 minutes in length and divided into three movements: Part 1, Part 2, and Part 3. As in the indoor version, the music is antiphonal, with an orchestra of 216 musicians (200 guitarists and 16 bassists) surrounding the seated audience on three sides – across the front of the space and along the left and right sides of the audience. Rather than go through a standard sound amplification system that projects the sound only from the stage, the orchestra surrounds the audience with guitar amplifiers, making a total of 216 discrete points of sound, creating the ultimate surround-sound system.

The 200 guitarists and 16 bassists of *A Crimson Grail* are divided into four smaller





orchestras of between 50 and 56 musicians each, referred to as Sections, each of equal importance. The four sub-orchestras are each led by a Section Leader: David Daniell for Section One, Seth Olinsky for Section Two, John King for Section Three, and Ned Sublette for Section Four. During the three days of rehearsals leading up to the day of the performance, the Section Leaders worked with the musicians to teach and explain the individual parts. They described the unique techniques required to perform this music, demonstrating how the music is played and how each part fits into the section as well as into the full orchestra.

The guitarists are also divided into different tuning groups: a high soprano tuning (for the melodic lines), a mid-range alto tuning (for the counterpoint) and a lower-range tenor tuning (consisting of all E strings in order to reinforce the overtones and affect the overall sonority of the piece). Each musician is required to restring their guitar according to their assigned tuning group. The different tuning groups, all of which play equally vital roles, are distributed throughout the orchestra for sonic balance. Each Section contains the full complement of tunings: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto 1, Alto 2, Tenor 1, Tenor 2, and Bass. The guitar tunings consist of two lower unison pitches, which sound as drone strings, functioning much like the drone strings of a sitar. The drone strings also serve to reinforce the harmonics and overtones of the overall composite waveform of the sound of all 200 electric guitars. The concept of having unisons in the tunings was always an important component in this compositional approach from *Guitar Trio* (1977) up to *An Angel Moves Too Fast to See*. In *A Crimson Grail* the higher four

strings are tuned in unison and are used to play the melody as the drone strings are also sounded, giving the music its modal, meditative quality.

Since certain movements of the outdoor version of *A Crimson Grail* depend heavily on rhythmic precision, an additional part was written in 2009 for a percussionist. The percussion part – consisting solely of a hi-hat cymbal – serves the purpose of synchronizing the entire orchestra, and doing so musically.

As a minimalist composition, *A Crimson Grail* focuses more on the grandiose sonic effects of such a large quantity of instruments and musicians rather than on complexity within any of the individual parts. The music is about the result of putting together 216 small, simple parts to make something that is greater than the sum of those parts. Although each individual musician's contribution is technically simple to play for a professional or serious amateur guitarist, the challenge and the beauty of *A Crimson Grail* comes with understanding and hearing the complex interactions between the many components of the whole.

THE GRAIL QUEST

Preparing for the 2008 Lincoln Center Out of Doors performance and recording meant a considerable number of personnel and logistical requirements had to be met. The 200 guitarists and 16 bassists would need to be professional-quality players (no amateurs) who could read music and could commit to three days of rehearsal in addition to the day of the show – which, due to the budget and the





number of people involved, would all be on a volunteer basis. There would need to be a secure indoor location with enough space (not to mention electricity) for the guitarists to rehearse on the three days in sections of 50, 100, and 200+, and also a way to arrange all of the musicians and amps safely at an outdoor space where several thousand people would be in attendance. It was also noted that *A Crimson Grail* should be performed close to sunset, as the piece was originally written to be performed in the evening.

Hundreds of guitarists applied; the applications came from other cities, states, and continents, from ages ten and twelve to sixty-plus, in singles and in groups – husbands and wives, fathers and sons – all people who were eager to fly to New York and devote the better part of a week in August to learning this beautifully strange and meditative work of music. Just to mount the rehearsals, there would need to be a special power distribution system, hundreds of chairs and music stands, and many miles of cable to power the amplifiers lining the long aisles of the rehearsal hall. During these three days of the rehearsals, the guitarists, who had been strangers to one another on the first day, gradually became friends and bandmates. *A Crimson Grail* is not only a concert performance, but also, truly, a coming-together of a musical community.

On August 15, 2008, the day of the show, an unlikely procession of 216 guitarists and amplifiers marched up Columbus Avenue, from the rehearsal hall to Lincoln Center, under gray skies. At 2 pm, the soundcheck began, and, as if on cue, the

sky brightened, and the sun came out. For several hours, Rhys, the section leaders, and the sound engineer worked out volume levels and dynamics, all in perfect weather, while a crowd of curious onlookers slowly assembled at the perimeter of the park, magnetically pulled in by the spectacle and the sound. At 5:30, the house opened, and several thousand people began streaming through the gates of Damrosch Park. It was then that the skies opened up and let loose a tornado-strength rainstorm that was equal in its ferocity and heartbreaking apathy to the brilliant sunshine happening just a few hours earlier. The production team and anyone around rushed to collect loose sheet music, cover amplifiers with plastic tarps, and gather the loose cords, pedals, and power strips that had been left in place. When the rain finally petered out, Lincoln Center's technical staff conducted a careful examination of the venue, only to find that the entire park site — amps, guitar cables, electricity and all — was submerged below an inch or two of water. After some very difficult conversations, the decision was made and announced that there was simply no way the guitarists could plug in and run the highly probable risk of electrocuting themselves and the many thousands of people who were still at the bandshell. The concert was over.

The story, however, was not, and almost immediately Lincoln Center started to make arrangements to remount the concert the following year. In 2009, Rhys Chatham rewrote parts of the score, added a percussionist to synchronize the timing across the huge ensemble, and clarified the instructions and cues that he thought could be improved upon from the first go-around. Of the 216 guitarists





and bassists who volunteered for round two of *A Crimson Grail*, a remarkable 120 were “alumni” musicians who had also taken part “the last time” and wanted another chance to get it right. Lincoln Center’s technical staff created an elaborate weatherproof setup comprising hundreds of feet of riser platforms and white tents to protect the musicians from whatever the gods might have in mind for them.

Finally, on the night of August 8, 2009, *A Crimson Grail* began, first with a ragalike drone stilling the crowd and focusing their attention, followed by the antiphonal call and response of guitar tremolo circling the audience members, who sat surrounded by 216 amplifiers. At the grand finale of the piece, when the guitars start to near the summit of that final glorious crescendo — about 65 minutes into this live recording — a crowd estimated at nearly 10,000 people at Damrosch Park spontaneously stood up from their chairs in unison and cheered, as if they were at a revival meeting. As someone remarked after, it was more than slightly suggestive of King George II rising to his feet at the triumphant “Hallelujah” chorus of Handel’s *Messiah*.

—Rhys Chatham, Regina Greene, and Ronen Givony

Musicians:

Bill Abdale
John Allen
Ernest Anderson
Ed Arndt
Daniel Bailen
Brendan Baker
Lindsay Baker
John Banister
Salima Barday
Asim Barnes
Jason Bartell
Ethan Bassford
Brian Beatrice
Martin Beeler
Brad Bennett
Cain Blanchard
Casey Block
Travis Bogosian
Gabriel Bonanno
Giancarlo Bracchi
Christopher Brokaw
Ernest Brooks
Bill Brovold
Gus Brovold
Andrew Burnes
Sal Cataldi
Oliver Chapoy
Noah Chasin
Manon Chatham
George Chen
Jeff Ciproni
Ty Citerman
Tiziano Coccio

Rob Cohn
Heather Coleman
Craig Colorusso
Evan Cordes
Michael Cumella
Anthony D'Amato
Eric Davich
Vincent Del Basso
Garrett Devoe
Eddie Dias
Joe Dizney
Christopher Doyle
James Duncan
Kat Dyson
Meghan Dzyak
Olumide Earth
Paul Edwards
Zachary Fairbrother
Brad Farberman
Robert Fellman
Sean Ferguson
Shannon Fields
Steve Five
Justin Foley
Patrick Foley
Chris Forsyth
Eric Freund
Emilie Friedlander
Derek Gaines
Bernard Gann
John Garland
Anthony Gedrich
Aaron Gemmill
Chris Georges
Thomas Gerke

Geoff Gersh
Doug Gillard
Devon Goldberg
Michael Goldman
Brian Good
Kurt Gottschalk
Michael Green
Wavley Groves
Brady Gunnell
Bryce Hackford
Hugh Haggerty
David Haiman
Ryan Hansen
Stefan Happ
Gavin Harper
William Harvey
Robert Hatch-Miller
Matt Hayes
Ian Henderson
Dave Herr
Cary Hirschstein
Jaime Hodge
Stephen Hoffman
Adam Holofcener
Kim Howie
Melissa Huffsmith-Roth
Trevor Hunter
J Ivceovich
Dana Janssen
Kevin Jones
Justin Kantor
Brian Kastan
Nicholas Kuepfer
David Kurutz
Patrick Kwon

Richard Lainhart
David Leonard
Claudio Lescano
Nick Lesley
Alex Lewis
Ezer Lichtenstein
Sarah Lipstate
David Little
Vincent Lo Verme
Naomi Lore
Tristram Lozaw
Amy Madden
Robert Madler
Julian Maile
Mark Maloof
Dennis Marmon
James Martin
Aaron Martinez
Bob Maynard
Tom McCauley
Colter McCorkindale
Kenneth McKim
Jason McMahon
Jason Meeks
Matthew Mehlan
John Melillo
Lucio Menegon
Gustav Mergins
Benjamin Metzger
Kevin Micka
Brent Miles
James Morganti
Warren Ng
Tyler Nolan
Valerie Opielski

Akwetey Orraca-Tetteh
Ryan Pape
Keith Patchel
Rene Penaloza-Galvan
Bob Petrocelli
Vito Petruzzelli
Jon Philpot
Duane Pitre
Robert Poss
Arthur Purvis
Michael Quoma
Gar Ragland
Sean Redmond
Benjamin Reid
Charles Rhyner
James Ross
Lou Rossi
Nicholas Sadler
Victor Salazar
Jessica Salzinski
David Satkowski
Doug Schrashun
Danielle Schwob
Scrote
Jodi Shapiro
Sara Shapouri
Tim Shrout
Mathias Sias
Larry Simon
David Sims
Marc Sloan
Franziska Staubli
Josh Steinbauer
Lauren Stockner
Matthew Stone

Konstantinos Stratigos
Martha Swetzoff
Matthew Taylor
Andrew Thomas
Greg Timm
Scott Townsend
Stefanos Tsigrimanis
Brian Turner
William Tyler
Kip Uhlhorn
Jeremias Umana
Harvey Valdes
Michael Vallera
Bryan Vargas
Ben Vida
Derek Vockins
David Vogt
Giancarlo Vulcano
Lance Walker
Seth Colter Walls
Ellia Weg
Ian Weinberger
Byron Westbrook
Matthew Whyte
Trevor Williams
Adam Wills
Elliot Winard
Marcin Wisniewski
Kurt Wolf
Greg Wolfe
Daniel Zlotsky
Joshua Zucker

Hi-Hat:
Ryan Sawyer

Composer and Conductor
Rhys Chatham

Concertmaster
David Daniell

Section Leaders
David Daniell, Section 1
Seth Olinsky, Section 2
John King, Section 3
Ned Sublette, Section 4

Producer and Manager
Regina Greene, Front Porch Productions

Technical Director
Eric Block

Front Porch Production Assistants
Sara Baker
Jennifer Corum
Danny Greene
Brad Loving

Production Stage Manager
Gabriella Bekeffi

Photographer
Paula Court

Presented by Lincoln Center Out of Doors and
Wordless Music.

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Technical Director for Lincoln Center Out of Doors
2009: Randall Etheredge

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