

PRESS RELEASE

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Unusual Pianist/Philosopher Collaboration Calls for Action on Extinction

Their newly released DVD weaves piano performance and powerful writing to express the moral necessity of safeguarding Earth's abundance of lives

Words alone cannot express the urgency of saving the planet's great diversity of plants and animals from extinction, philosopher/writer Kathleen Dean Moore and concert pianist Rachel McCabe believe. So they have turned to music, joining forces to create a dual performance, "A Call to Life: Variations on a Theme of Extinction." For the project, Moore weaves a call to safeguard Earth's abundance of species into McCabe's performance of Sergei Rachmaninoff's "Variations on a Theme of Corelli." The synergy of words and music creates what an audience member called "as powerful a message as one could imagine." "It is at once devastating and inspiring, despairing and hopeful," wrote ocean conservationist Mark Hixon, who heard the performance in Hawaii.

After live performances in the US and Canada, Moore and McCabe produced a studio version of the performance, directed and edited by Eric Gleske. The performance is now available free on Moore's website, www.riverwalking.com. It is accompanied by a guide to discussion of what individuals and groups can do to stop the habitat destruction and pollution that are devastating the planet's small lives at the rate of 150 species a day -- birds, frogs, fishes, orchids, beetles. By making the performance widely available, they hope that organizations -- churches, universities, conservation groups, local governments, environmental justice organizations, peace groups, activists -- will use the materials to create a powerful public discourse that moves from intellectual understanding of the problem of extinction, to emotional involvement and courageous, effective action.

The unusual creative collaboration began when Moore spoke in despair from the podium at Oregon State University several years ago. "If these rates of extinction continue," she said, "I will die in a world that is half as abundantly beautiful as the one I was born into. My children will tear out half the pages in their field guides and throw them away. They won't need them ever again."

Listening from the audience, concert pianist Rachele McCabe nodded in agreement. "Words can't do it," she thought. "But music has that power. And words and music together?" As Moore left the stage, McCabe stopped her in the aisle and suggested a collaboration.

That was the beginning of “A Call to Life: Variations on a Theme of Extinction.” Unity College president emeritus Mitch Thomashow, who caught the performance in Seattle, called it “. . . truly exceptional. The power, eloquence, wisdom, urgency, and insight of the presentation, the synergy of the music and the reading was brilliant. . . an emotional connection to the planetary emergency.”

Following several performances in North America, Moore and McCabe presented the world premiere of “A Call to Life” at the World Congress of the Union for the Conservation of Nature in Honolulu. More performances are scheduled in Calgary, Flagstaff, and at Oregon State University on April 7, 2017.

Moore and McCabe have collaborated before, team-teaching Oregon State University courses that brought philosophy and music together to explore concepts such as love, nature, evil, and music itself. But the extinction collaboration involved an intensity of feeling and effort neither had experienced before. “I knew from the start that it had to be Rachmaninoff,” McCabe explained. The piece she chose, “Variations on a Theme of Corelli (opus 42, 1931), is what she calls “a formidable piece of music to address a formidable global issue.” Written during a dark period in Rachmaninoff’s life, the deeply expressive music gives voice to all the grief and yearning in the human heart.

Over a period of several months, Moore listened intently as McCabe played the music and spoke of its meaning for her. Then Moore began to write words to weave over and between the variations. “It was the most intense writing I’ve ever done,” Moore said. “We were trying to open people’s hearts without breaking them. But often, as we worked, we were both in tears.”

In this respect, “A Call to Life” differs from other science-art collaborations, which often use art to more effectively communicate scientific data. This performance uses art to add moral and emotional urgency to the scientific data, providing not only the terrifying statistics of extinction, but the deep values that make saving species a moral obligation.

“This is a call to conscience, to caring, and a call to action,” Moore says. “All around the world, people are standing up to say, ‘not another mountaintop, not another river, not another forest can be destroyed for human profit. These are not industry’s to take or sell. They belong to the future of the everlasting Earth.’ Now we are saying it with music.”

Kathleen Dean Moore is a career philosopher, nature writer, and veteran climate advocate best known for her ability to weave ideas and emotions in her lectures and books. She is the author or co-editor of a dozen books, including *Riverwalking*, *Great Tide Rising*, and the newest, a novel, *Piano Tide*. Rachelle McCabe, concert pianist and Professor of Music at Oregon State University, enjoys an international career as an artist-teacher and as a solo recitalist and highly respected chamber musician. She has performed extensively in the United States, Canada, Southeast Asia and England, and has been heard on NPR’s *Performance Today*,

the CBC, and PBS television.