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## SXIP SHIREY AND COCO KAROL



*“Shirey is the living embodiment of the spirit of [John Cage](#), committed to the tenets that music is play and listening to music is an active endeavor.”* —Classical Voice North America, 2018

## THE GAUNTLET

An immersive choral performance audiences walk through

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*"[Sxip Shirey's] music sounds like stories. He works in the places where noise becomes music and does things that make you realize there are no boundaries between noise and music—or not like you imagine"*  
—Neil Gaiman.

## THE GAUNTLET

By Sxip Shirey and Coco Karol

### SUMMARY —

The following document has been prepared by composer, Sxip Shirey and choreographer, Coco Karol to present *The Gauntlet*—an immersive choral composition comprised of different musical strategies where singers are choreographed in configurations designed for audience members to walk through. The text is culled from stories transcribed during “Movement Interviews” with the choir and/ or local communities.

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## WHO WE ARE—

**Sxip Shirey** is an avant garde composer specializing in populist music that is often used for circus, dance, and theater. He has released seven albums including three solo albums, toured internationally, and been recognized by press worldwide. He is known for innovative instrumentation and object oriented compositions which he often performs and presents to audiences with stories, dialog, and delight. (For full bio and CV please visit [www.sxipshirey.com](http://www.sxipshirey.com) )

**Coco Karol** is a dancer and choreographer who creates cross-disciplinary performance works about how we make meaning of personal experience and communicate through gesture, touch, and effort. She has had an expansive dance career in New York and has choreographed works for stage and film as well as for art galleries and public art. (For full bio and CV please visit [www.findingcoco.net](http://www.findingcoco.net) )

## WHERE THE GAUNTLET HAS BEEN PERFORMED:

- The Sydney Opera House, Antidote Festival, with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs 2018
- Cleveland Museum of Art, Solstice Celebration, choir members from different local choirs, 2018
- Central Park, Make Music New York, with Choral Chameleon, 2017
- 450 year anniversary of Fredrickstad, Norway, with students from the Norwegian Theater Academy, 2016
- The Highline, NYC, Make Music New York & Friends of the Highline, with Choral Chameleon, 2016
- Brooklyn Studios for Dance, Let Light In festival, with members of Brooklyn Contemporary Chorus, 2016

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## DESCRIPTION:

Duration: 15-90 min

**The Gauntlet** is an immersive choral experience where audience members are guided by dancer, Coco Karol through musical corridors created by a 30-100 person choir, all standing on footstools, in two long rows facing each other. The composer, Sxip Shirey, sings phrases and tones to singers at one end of the line, who then take the musical phrases from Shirey and pass them down the line and across the aisles, singer by singer, until the phrases reach the end of the line. Music passed by singers is accompanied by choreographed gestures, creating ripples of sound and movement. The effect of walking through The Gauntlet's sonic architectures is an intimate experience for audience members, like walking through a tunnel and being bathed in waves of harmony, poetry, and gesture.

Shirey composes *The Gauntlet* to fit the site and the community he creates it for. Ideally workshops with a local choir take place prior to the performance. In these workshops, Karol and Shirey work with choir members to develop gestures and generate language for The Gauntlet. Together, they consider the architecture, history and culture of a site and come up with the compositional strategies for the performance. The duration and structure of *The Gauntlet* are easily adapted to the needs of the program/ curation. The Gauntlet may be performed with or without doing "Movement Interviews" to generate language for the Libretto.

### **Movement Interviews**

Movement Interviews were developed by Karol as a way of engaging with local communities and allowing the final Gauntlet performance to be a reflection of the community with which it is performed in. The result is an audience experience of walking through the urgent ideas, language, and stories of members of the local community, turned into song. Lyrics for *The Gauntlet* are culled by Shirey from "movement interviews" that Karol conducts with a curated group of local artists, activists, change-makers in the week/s leading up to the performance. Karol collaborates with the curators and presenters of the festival/ event to tailor the interview subject matter to the curatorial themes. She also invites the curator to cherry-pick 5-15 individuals from the community to be interviewed. In the event that this extra curatorial step is not desired or possible, Karol then interviews select members of the choir.

A "movement interview" is a twenty minute gestural and verbal dialogue. It is a methodology Karol developed that uses poetic lines of questioning alongside movement to address the body as an archive of personal knowledge. The "movement interviews" for The Gauntlet have been

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inquiries into each participant's phenomenological experience of "home" and belonging, and can be tailored to the curatorial themes of the presenting venue/ festival.

#### MINIMAL TECHNICAL NEEDS:

- Choir: 30-100 singers comprised of signers from local choirs.
- Interview subjects: 5-15 local community members chosen by the curator/s\*\*\*
- Footstools numbering the amount of singers (approx. 30 footstools)  
(footstools: <https://www.amazon.com/Jeronic-11-Inch-Plastic-Folding-Stool/> )
- Minimum 3 hours of rehearsal with choir for pre-composed Gauntlet
- Minimum 5 days to create an original composition, wherein the full choir is present for 2 days and movement interviews are conducted with smaller groups on the other days.

\*\*\* This is only a requirement if the presenting venue chooses to have movement interviews as a part of the performance.

#### Video:

#### Three Compositional Gauntlet Strategies

##### Echo Gauntlet: passing tones and phrases

50 singers stand in pairs on stools in two lines, creating a hallway—a "gauntlet"— of singers. Composer, Shirey, is positioned on one side, feeding melodies, tones and harmonies into the Gauntlet that operates as a playable instrument for the composer. Karol guides the audience through the choral architecture potentially with three local dancers who also attend the free workshop prior to the performance. Once the members of the audience have made it to the end of the line of singers, they are then free to listen and watch from the outside of the human architecture or return to the start and move through it again. Wherever an audience member chooses to position him/herself to listen to *The Gauntlet* —in its corridor, or around its periphery— each position will afford the spectator a new experience of how the composition is heard.

Example of Echo Gauntlet with Choral Chameleon, Brooklyn 2017:

<https://youtu.be/LDRGIP0HDik>

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## Labyrinth Gauntlet: getting lost in sound

= blue boxes represent the singers' stools. The arrangement and size are not to scale. the singers' stools are arranged to suggest a labyrinth.

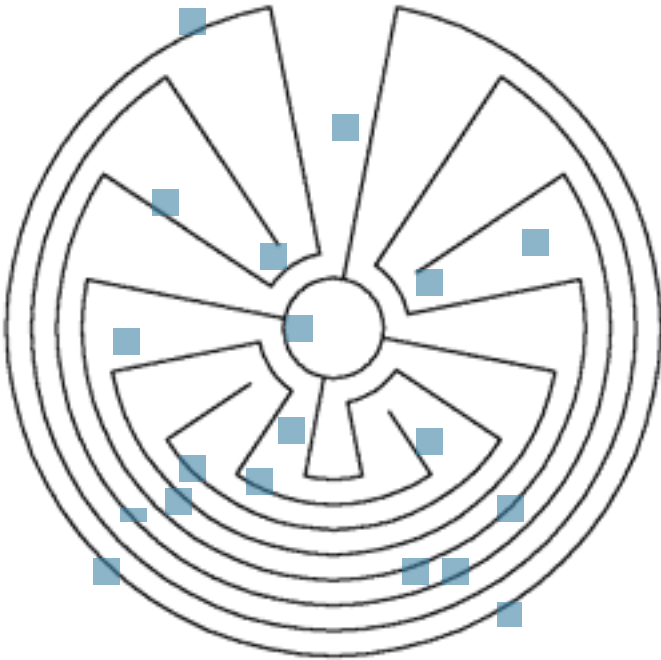


Image:

*The Gauntlet Sound of Fredrickstad, Norway 2016. These images show a rehearsal to create the labyrinth gauntlet structure with students from the Norwegian Theater Academy*

### Labyrinth Gauntlet:

The performance moves to a second location where stools have been arranged into a choreographic object<sup>1</sup> resembling an incomplete labyrinth. Singers step up onto the stools

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<sup>1</sup> A choreographic object is a term and practice borrowed from William Forsythe. It is an object that precipitates and incites actions in those who encounter it. "A choreographic object is not a substitute for the body, but rather an alternative site for the understanding of potential instigation and organization of action to reside." -William Forsythe (<<http://www.williamforsythe.com/essay.html>>)

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as they sing extended tones from simple melodies. As audience members walk between the maze of bodies, they are able to experience different levels of intimacy and proximity with different chord clusters as they are formed. The singers and the spectators move through the labyrinth, completing and dismantling the pathways of the structure as they go.

*Hocketing Gauntlet:*

In this type of gauntlet the singers work in pairs, repeating short melodic loops. Each pair passes a single phrase, note by note, syllable by syllable between them. The loops between pairs do not change, therefore the audience must move through the Hocketing Gauntlet to experience the intended composition. Hocketing is a technique used by medieval choirs and championed in contemporary music by composer, Meredith Monk.

“Everybody’s intimate experience is epic to them” - Sxip Shirey



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