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The Tell-Tale Heart

NEW YORK CITY

The Crypt Sessions, On Site Opera

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JUST IN TIME FOR HALLOWEEN (October 28), The Crypt Sessions, in collaboration with On Site Opera, came through with the hair-raising world premiere of Gregg Kallor's musical monodrama *The Tell-Tale Heart*, based on Edgar Allen Poe's classic chiller. The brainchild of Andrew Ousley of Unison Media, The Crypt Sessions is a chamber music series that takes advantage of the perfect acoustics of the small, vaulted crypt of The Church of the Intercession on upper Broadway. Even for less ghoulish fare, it's a uniquely intimate, welcoming setting, as demonstrated by the first two pieces on the program: Kallor's jazzy, ruminative piano solo "Where You Are" from his suite *Notes from the Underground* and his intricate cello sonata, *Undercurrent*, executed with passionate intensity by cellist Joshua Roman. Kallor was the expressive pianist for both works, and both he and Roman accompanied the evening's main event, *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

It's difficult to imagine a more atmospheric venue or riveting soloist, mezzo-soprano Elizabeth Pojanowski. Entering in the dark through a door that creaked as if it were speaking a line of dialogue, Pojanowski cautiously took her place on a small platform, dressed in hospital scrubs and clogs, her hair pulled into a severe ponytail, her face devoid of makeup. Lost in her recollections of her murder and dismemberment of the old man for whom she cared, she seemed completely unaware of the audience, despite the proximity of the seating. It was a bravura acting performance, layered with unpredictable bursts of anger, glee, indignation, disgust, and the occasional shimmer of, if not remorse, at least regret. Kallor's vocal writing was refreshingly gracious and intelligible, allowing Pojanowski moments of lyricism, as well as providing hints for dramatic emphasis, which she followed scrupulously. Director Sarah Meyers suggested an interrogation room with a metal chair and a single lamp that cast harsh shadows on Pojanowski's face. The confinement forced Pojanowski to climb onto the chair at one point as if trying to escape her own skin, and she modulated the character's increasing madness to make her ultimate breakdown both surprising and inevitable. Shawn Kaufman's strategically placed red lights throbbed in rhythm with Pojanowski's anguished revelation of the dead man's beating heart under the floorboards. To restore spiritual equilibrium, Kallor and Roman offered an encore of Arvo Pärt's "Spiegel im Spiegel," as Kaufman bathed the arches with soothing lavender. —*Joanne Sydney Lessner*