

# Mercury Falling

*Mercury Falling*, an innovative monodrama for tenor, dancer, and chamber ensemble, is a fanciful interpretation of the last night in the life of Parisian sculptor Jean-Louis Brian (1805-1864).

In the winter of 1864, Brian attempted to protect his clay statue of “Mercury in Repose” from the bitter cold by covering it with his only blankets, and subsequently froze to death beside it. *Mercury Falling* depicts Brian’s feverish attempts to finish his legendary sculpture for the impending Salon exhibition. As the temperature drops and he succumbs to hypothermic hallucinations, he is lured into a fantasy world in which the god Mercury comes to life. Incorporating themes of the artist’s struggle for meaning, recognition and even survival, *Mercury Falling* is a contemporary monologue that shifts between reality and an allegorical fantasy world. The singer portrays Jean-Louis Brian through vignettes of music and text in free-association, accompanied in a theatrical staging by a dancer portraying Mercury. The orchestration alternately evokes the freezing, desperate climate of the artist’s studio and Brian’s increasingly grandiose expectations for his work of art.

***Mercury Falling* uniquely combines elements of opera, theater and dance in an interdisciplinary venture that is both compact and versatile. With flexible production values and innovative staging, it fits naturally in a variety of traditional theater spaces—proscenium, thrust or arena—and easily adapts to non-traditional settings, working effectively in museums, black box theaters, art/performance studios and exhibition spaces.**

**Musically, there is great utility in the choice of either chamber orchestra or a piano four-hands accompaniment, providing versatility and also a practical option for production scenarios with fiscal limitations. The dance component is also malleable; as it allows for utilizing a local dancer and choreographer to bridge the production with a specific dance company, conservatory or university program. *Mercury Falling* stands alone as equally suitable for opera, theater or dance companies, in addition to chamber music and art museum special event programming.**



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Mercury  
Falling

# Mercury Falling (ca. 45')

Music by CHANDLER CARTER, Libretto by DANIEL NEER, Directed by TED GORODETZKY

**CHARACTERS** Jean-Louis Brian.....tenor  
Mercury.....dancer

<b>ORCHESTRATION</b>	flute	piano	alternate version for piano four-hands
	clarinet in A	1st and 2nd violin	
	horn	viola	
	trumpet in C	violoncello	
	vibraphone and	double bass	
	miscellaneous percussion		

The play takes place in the artist's studio in Paris in early 1864.

## STORY & ACTION

Jean-Louis Brian, a mature, but unappreciated sculptor, has nearly completed his "Mercury in Repose," intended as an entry for the upcoming Salon exposition. However, the intense cold and his exhaustion have begun to compromise his technical and mental clarity. As he puts the finishing touches on his work, he frets about its flaws, his meager living conditions and his life of anonymity and poverty.

Conversely, Brian is also certain his statue will be included in the exhibition and win the top prize, revitalizing his wunderkind reputation. He rhapsodizes about the power and beauty of his subject, listing Mercury's many attributes as a shining messenger and guide for heroes of antiquity. Brian reflects back to his first artistic yearnings and youthful glory. Now jealous of other artists' success, he fantasizes about a life of fame and fortune, painting himself as a mythic hero. In a long, steady crescendo of bravado and determination, Brian conjures his illustrious reception at the Salon by artists, the jury and public, as well as the honors and awards that await him.

Imagining that he is presenting his work at Salon, Brian senses the jury is not impressed, forcing him to grandstand and embarrass himself before the crowd until the dismissal bell sounds. In a self-destructive fury, he wrestles with his Mercury and pushes his statue from its stand. Horrified at his own actions, Brian suddenly reverts to his role as loving creator, carefully returning the statue to its original position and, to protect it from freezing, lays his only blanket over it. Confident that his work is saved but shivering violently in the cold, the exhausted artist succumbs to the overwhelming desire to sleep.

## THE CREATIVE TEAM



**Daniel Neer**, a performer and writer, has worked in projects ranging from opera and concert repertoire to experimental and interdisciplinary works. Featured soloist: Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, The Apollo Theater, Guggenheim Museum, The Kitchen, Galapagos Art Space and in many operas and concerts in the U.S. and abroad. Broadway: Baz Luhrmann's *La Bohème*, and *Coram Boy*, directed by Melly Still. Recent projects: Pete Wyer's *Numinous City* (Royal Opera House Covent Garden ROH2 series), Danilo in *The Merry Widow* (Opera Delaware), Evangelist for Arvo Pärt's *Passio* (The Dessoff Choirs), *Vaudeville Revue* (Knoxville's Historic Tennessee Theater). Upcoming projects: Temptor in Britten's *The Prodigal Son*, and *Narkissos*, an original multi-media recital, at The Tank Performing Space and Queens New Music Festival. As librettist: Chandler Carter's *Mercury Falling* (Long Leaf Opera Festival) and Sidney Boquiren's *Odes to Earth and Air* (Adelphi University). His epic poem, *The Gyre*, set by composer Robinson McClellan, recently premiered at Yale University, and his play, *The Interview*, was recently chosen for the 'New Works International Festival for Short Plays' in NYC. | [danielneer.com](http://danielneer.com)



**Chandler Carter**'s works—which include over 50 songs, choral, chamber and orchestral works and three operas—have been performed throughout the United States and in Canada and Europe by numerous distinguished recitalists and ensembles. He has received several awards, including two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. Carter is one of a select few composers to have two operas, *Strange Fruit* (2003) and *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (2009), selected by New York City Opera for its annual VOX showcase of new works. Carter's most recent staged work, the one-act monodrama *Mercury Falling*, was presented at the 2009 Long Leaf Opera summer festival. According to a reviewer, this work “only strengthens his reputation as an inspired musician.” Carter's music has been performed and programmed by numerous groups, including the Da Capo Chamber Players, the Quintet of the Americas, the Latin American Wind Quintet, Denver Chamber Orchestra and the Westchester Philharmonic, amongst others. Notable choruses, including the Riverside Choir in NYC, regularly perform his original choral music and arrangements. | [chandlercarter.com](http://chandlercarter.com)



**Ted Gorodetzky** has staged numerous plays and musical works throughout his diverse career in the arts. Recent directorial work includes *Vultures* with Rising Sun Performance Company, two play premieres at Richmond Shepard Theater in NYC, *The Survival Show* at Theater 80 at St. Marks, the *Works in Progress* series for New York Women in Film and Television, *Chance*, a new drama, at the Porch Light Theatre, *Odes to Earth and Air* (Director & Multimedia Composition) at Adelphi University, and the original chamber theater piece, *Mercury Falling*, which was presented by Long Leaf Opera Festival in Raleigh, NC where it garnered critical success and enjoyed an outstanding reception amongst festival audiences. He is a founding member of Totem Gambol, an arts collective, with whom he has directed and written many works. Behind the camera, he has directed *First Time* and *Secret Santa Secret*, both also his screenplays. Upcoming projects: *Narkissos*, a theatrical song recital, at The Tank in NYC and 2012 Queens New Music Festival (Director & Multimedia Composition), and *Barbed Wire Waltz*, a biographical cabaret of Robert Stoltz (Co-writer & Director). | [tedgoro.com](http://tedgoro.com)

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## GALLERY



*"The only work exhibited at any of the Salons that Rodin ever singled out for praise was Jean-Louis Brian's Mercury. This statue won a Medal of Honor at the Salon of 1864. Rodin called it 'one of the finest things in the world... Such force and beauty!' The figure is a simple male nude at rest, in a conservative classical mode. Part of Rodin's enthusiasm was an empathetic response to the story known by almost everyone in Paris: Brian had frozen to death in his unheated studio, having wrapped Mercury with the blankets from his bed so that it would not freeze and break apart."*

— Ruth Butler, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius*

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## PRESS & CRITICAL RESPONSE

“Carter's score beautifully conjures icy coldness with tinkling short phrases and fevered delirium with dissonant, skittering chords. The music constantly changes to fit Brian's mood swings. These are superbly realized by Neer as performer, his voice coloring all Brian's fears and yearnings while expressing his derangement with haunting physicality... The physical interaction of sculptor and statue is viscerally staged, adding nuanced dimensions to the concept, sensitively shaped by director Ted Gorodetzky... this is a confident, intriguing work.”

— Roy C. Dicks, *The News & Observer*

"The four hands on one piano provided music that was in turns mystical, affectionate, conflicted, triumphant, and much more, reflecting the monologue (and, at times, implied dialogue) and action on the stage. The sculptor admires his work, becomes suspicious of it, angry with it, at one with it... Neer's singing took us through emotional paroxysms of immense proportions... it was a strangely and powerfully moving drama."

— Ken Hoover, *Classical Voice of North Carolina*

“MERCURY is a joy—a beautiful and unusual combination of music, drama, movement and meaning! This opera deserves many more performances!”

— Patricia Heuermann  
*Former President, National Opera Association*

“Mercury Falling, by Chandler Carter and Daniel Neer, is an intense and stunning collaborative effort. This is an important work that brings several art forms together in the telling of this dramatic and tragic story. Mercury Falling deserves the attention a full production would garner; these collaborative artists have created a memorable ‘night at the theater.’”

— Barbara A. Peters  
*Former Executive Director, Greensboro Opera*