



# The Edge of Forever: A Ritual of Time

By Yuval Sharon

Opera shares a natural affinity with ritual—for some, the ritual of attending the opera, the dressing-up, the champagne at intermission, and the falling asleep in Act III are part of the expected behavioral cycle of participation. But opera as ritual can also be understood formally, as making sacred the moment of performance: the grace of a coordinated effort of musical and theatrical forces in the service of a temporary monument, a sculpture of air. If music is the organization of time, opera makes that organization contingent on a transient space. The score is the focal point of a devotion that enshrines the time and place, with the hope that they will collapse into each other. “*Zum Raum wird hier die Zeit*” – “Here time becomes space,” proclaims a character in Wagner’s most mystical work *Parsifal*, which isn’t designated an opera but a “festival” devoted to consecrating the specific site of the performance, the Bayreuther Festspielhaus.

Although Lewis Pesacov and Elizabeth Cline’s meditative *The Edge of Forever* is aesthetically far from a Wagnerian vision, their intention is similar: *The Edge of Forever* is a festival devoted to consecrating the specific *time* of the performance—the precise end of the Mayan calendar on December 21, 2012. I don’t know of any opera so radically devoted to a particular moment in time—literally a once-in-all-time occurrence.

As in Wagnerian opera-as-ritual, an aspiration for ritual to forge a unity of time and space is *The Edge of Forever*’s dramaturgical imperative. The space the creators designated for the one-night-only showing was the Philosophical Research Society in Los Angeles, founded in 1934 by Manly Thomas Hall and housing a library of over 50,000 volumes of research on esoteric traditions. The piece began in the courtyard, as the audience gathered to hear voices ringing from all around. Bells led the audience in a processional style into the auditorium, re-enacting the narrative pilgrimage of the scribes into an inner sanctum. There we found a gloriously costumed ancient astronomer deep in meditation and discovered ourselves in the final act of a drama that began many centuries ago. We found ourselves in the presence of a prophecy being fulfilled: the premonition of a divine love between this astronomer and a distant beloved, a cosmic union that will begin a new, undocumented era of time.

Pesacov’s score, like the processional staging, is a transformative process that draws us into the inner sanctum of Laakan’s long inner journey. The music seems intent on breaking through thresholds of perception with the flow of a river on its inexorable path to the ocean. In the final scene, the tenor’s long lines over shimmering, oscillating textures might lead you to believe you’ve broken through to that space on the other end of time.

But we haven’t lost time in this ecstatic final scene—an insistent but faint drumbeat, a steady, regular keeper of time, underlies almost the entirety of this expansive scene. That drumbeat tells us that despite the sacred ritual of the performance, we haven’t entirely broken free of the material world. Laakan pronounces a new era based on his deep devotion to his beloved—but Cline’s libretto does not stage the materialization of Etnab; no love duet here, but a solitary aria. The eternity that Laakan

and Etnab’s love promises is invoked in the euphoric language, but she remains immaterial, a dream (at least for us spectators). The ritual, whether a Mass or a secular opera, doesn’t pretend to *realize* its utopian vision; instead, the ritual *invokes* the longed-for union as a possibility, comprehensible only as an enactment, a play, far inferior to its longed-for fulfillment. A perfectly executed ritual offers a glimpse of what that utopia *could* look like, and it inspires its spectators to strive for its true realization in the space beyond the ritual (that is, everyday life). That sense of the unrealized, the unattained, the imperfect, is precisely what makes the ritual so human.

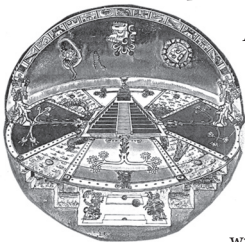
Could a piece so devoted to a sliver of time still maintain its power three years later? This beautiful recording proves it does. Even better, listening to it allows us to enact the ritual in our imaginations, anytime we want.

## Forever

By Elizabeth Cline

I began writing *The Edge of Forever* by delving into hieroglyphic, Quiché and Yucatec Maya language texts. The vivid creation stories of the *Popol Vuh* and the mythological *Chilam Balam* illustrate the Mayan cosmology, narrative structures, and elliptical language that inspired the opera. These sacred texts along with many volumes on New Age spirituality informed the truth, fiction and poetry of the libretto.

In the Yucatec Maya oral tradition, stories are told in the present tense, always in progress. Events do not unfold linearly but rather storytellers paint word pictures, manifesting symbolic narratives or moral lessons for the listener. Like the Mayan Calendar these moments are woven together to create an infinite garland interpreting the universe without beginning or end. Stories become energy moving dynamically through the past and present.



Aligning this storytelling tradition with December 21, 2012, the auspicious ending of a great time cycle, established a fertile ground for exploring the nature of consciousness and love in relationship to time. *The Edge of Forever* balances on the axis point of the past and future. To connect to the vast cosmic calendar I wrote the synopsis for a 3 act opera with the intention that only the final act was to be performed in the present tense on this fated date.

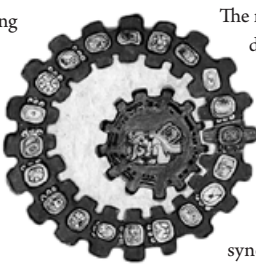
The continuity between the written yet unperformed events and the experienced event created a space to organize the drama around distinct states of being. Through the main character Laakan I focused on a part of our existence that is not in time – the state of being in love.

*The Edge of Forever* expands from the temporal into the metaphysical by way of a mystical union on the cosmic level. Laakan resides deep within a sacred cave, beset by echoes, shadows and stone. Here his yearning becomes so intense it eclipses the space between the material and spiritual. Buried beneath the earth he gradually flattens into the one-dimensional image of an ancient glyph. Hidden away he merges with the primacy of love, the desire for unity. The final scene is a quiet act of transcendence: there is no spectacle or transformative moment. It is his realization that love is infinite and not bound by time and that one can find forever in each moment..

# 13:20 The Sacred Proportion

By Lewis Pesacov

An essential concept of ancient Mayan cosmology is that time is infinitely cyclical, without beginning or end: the edge of one age simply reveals the dawn of the next. The Maya mirrored the multitudes of cycles observed in the natural world and distant cosmos onto a remarkably accurate and sophisticated system of interlocking harmonic calendars. Of these calendars, the Tzolk’in or sacred calendar is the oldest time cycle known in Mesoamerica and was used extensively in Mayan inscriptions and codices.



The mechanics of the Tzolk’in calendar are best described as two interlocking gears of a cosmic clock. The smaller gear, a cycle of 13 numbered days, turns within the larger gear, a cycle of 20 named days. As the gears spin, the numbered and named days fall out of sequence. After 20 revolutions of the smaller gear and 13 revolutions of the larger gear the two gears come back into sync, completing a cycle comprised of 260 unique numbered name days (20 x 13 = 260).

Our human anatomy also reflects this proportion; we have 20 digits, 13 joints and the human gestation period is approximately 260 days. Based in 20s, the Mayan counting system allowed for the rapid summation of large numbers, enabling the ancient astronomers to calculate celestial events extremely far into the future and past with great precision. In this light, the numbers 13 and 20 can be seen less as a human invention and more as a profound insight into the organizational tendencies within nature.

The music of *The Edge of Forever* is inspired by elements of ancient Mayan cosmology. I aimed to evoke a sound world hanging in the balance between imaginary ancient and futuristic music. In addition to a traditional chamber ensemble, the score calls for a sacred Mayan instrument, a conch shell blown on end, as well as the *modern* sound of pure tones generated by 8 sine wave oscillators.

I was drawn in by the deep meaning the Maya found within their calendric system, and how they explored finite interlocking cycles as a means to map the infinite. Fascinated by complex systems that represent the cosmic laws found under the surface of nature, I used their sacred proportion of 13:20 to generate the majority of the large-scale architectural forms as well as the small-scale, localized musical events. This illuminated a path for me to merge with the ancient laws and lore of the Maya. By imbuing the music with sacred meaning, I established a mode through which to contemplate the great mysteries and the grand design—a chance to glimpse the inner workings of the universal mind. Exploring the sacred Mayan calendars opened a corridor through which I traced back into the ancient past while simultaneously stepping into the future.

# THE EDGE OF FOREVER

## TIME

10.0.0.0.0 (March 13, 830 CE) to 13.0.0.0.0 (December 21, 2012 CE)

## SCENE

A small village outside the city of Chichén Itzá

## SYNOPSIS

Before the morning star, before the sun first rose from the east, it was foretold of a love to bring about the next great cycle of human consciousness. How the last generation ended, how this generation will end, how the next generation will begin, in the time long ago, now, and for eternity.

We enter the story in **ACT III** on the winter solstice, December 21, 2012, the eve of the end of a 5,125-year cycle of the Mayan Long Count Calendar.

*ACT I: 10.0.0.0.0 (MARCH 13, 830 CE)*

Atop a nine-step pyramid watchtower temple, a 360-degree view of unbroken horizon line, forest to ocean, a backdrop of twinkling jewels in the night.

As it was said, Laakan, the ancient astronomer, climbs to the top of the tower and calls upon Ix Chel to decipher an apparition in the sky and a shape carved in stone. The moon goddess shares her secret knowledge of the ancestors. Pointing to the Milky Way, she shows Laakan his soul's road in the vast galaxy, and the path that he must take to reach his celestial abode. His unity with Etnab, the beloved one, has been foretold since the beginning of time as the love to bring about a new age. He must take the enchanted obsidian and remain in the underground caves beneath the sacred cenote until the end of the 13th cycle of the Long Count Calendar. Only then will Etnab materialize and their love can be realized forever.

*ACT II: 10.0.0.0.0 (MARCH 13, 830 CE)*

On the smooth white cliff of the cenote. Light and smoke from torches choke the air, musky amber and charcoal engulf the scene.

As it was told, Laakan is led by procession to his sacrificial seclusion. In the reflection of the dark turquoise waters he sees a divine union. He descends to the depths under the sacred well; the cave seals behind him. The gods rejoice in the prophecy realized, the seven brightest stars of Ursa Major appear at once.

*ACT III: 13.0.0.0.0 (DECEMBER 21, 2012 CE)*

In the deep chasm of the well, a cave filled with centuries of offerings to the sacred cenote: masks, gold jewelry, copper bells, obsidian arrows, pottery, jade beads, ornaments of bone and shell, and maize cobs.

## SCENE I

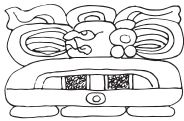
A procession of scribes pilgrimage to the cave beneath the sacred cenote to witness the fated journey of the ancient astronomer as told in the heavens and in stone. They enter where Laakan is deep in a meditative state.

## SCENES II–IV

Laakan tells of his great despair throughout the cycles as he waited to meet his destiny. He has extinguished every other desire to devote himself to love. He speaks of visions of his beloved, the union of souls, beyond the body and mind, into the infinite.

## SCENE V

The scribes announce the time is here for the prophesied end and beginning. Laakan proclaims his love heavenly and physically sublime. He declares the time is now for a spiritual awakening in love. All the time of the ages past, of moments present, of boundless eternity is theirs, as he stands on the edge of forever.



## Libretto

### SCENE I:

#### PROCESSION OF SCRIBES

#### SCRIBES:

*Descended is word,  
Heart of sky, heart of earth.*

*Time of taking his road,  
It shall be, it has been told.*

### SCENE II:

#### ENTR'ACTE

### SCENE III:

#### RECITATIVE

#### LAAKAN:

*The movement of heaven  
before me...*

*The expanse of time  
behind me...*

*The revolving of earth  
below me...*

*The depth of space  
above me...*

### SCENE IV:

#### ARIA 1

#### LAAKAN:

*Let the world pass by like waves,  
My love flows in stone engraved.*

*It ripples, murmurs, ripples, sighs, ripples, hums...*

*Silence—empty without you!*

*Cascading in an echo,  
Eternity in shadows,*

*Hope shines down through the moonrise.*

*It ripples, murmurs, ripples, sighs, ripples, hums.*

### SCENE V:

#### ARIA 2

#### LAAKAN:

*In the distant heaven I see,  
The whole of me forever.*

#### SCRIBES:

*From the past an ancient light,  
Burn bright now, two fates align.*

#### LAAKAN:

*Edge of world and sky,  
I promise you forever.*

#### SCRIBES:

*Past now shaping, unfolding,  
Future now forming, expanding.*

#### LAAKAN:

*Our love, timeless as dreams,  
From stone and to forever.*



Music by Lewis Pesacov  
Libretto by Elizabeth Cline

Produced & mixed by Lewis Pesacov  
Engineered by Nick Tipp, Lewis Pesacov & Clinton Weelander  
Mixed at Sunset Sound, Los Angeles, CA  
Additional mix engineering by Clinton Weelander  
Mastered by Reuben Cohen at Lurssen Mastering in Los Angeles, CA

∞ Scenes I & V recorded at Ahata Sound Studios, Los Angeles, CA  
Ω Scenes II, III & IV recorded live at the Philosophical Research Society, Los Angeles, CA, 12/21/2012

La’akan: Ashley Faatoalia ∞ Ω

Scribes, Scene I: Abby Fischer ∞  
Scribes, Scenes II, III & IV : Jessica Basta Ω, Tany Ling Ω, Christine Morse Ω, Argenta Walther Ω  
Scribes, Scene V: Ariel Downs & Lauren Davis ∞

Conductor: Christopher Rountree ∞ Ω

wild Up:  
Violin, Andrew Tholl ∞ Ω  
Violin, Javier Orman Ω, Andrew McIntosh ∞  
Viola, Andrew McIntosh Ω, Linnea Powell ∞  
Cello, Derek Stein ∞ Ω  
Conch shell, Allen Fogle ∞ Ω  
Conch shell, Jonah Levy ∞ Ω  
Soprano sax, Kathryn Olson Ω, Brian Walsh ∞  
English horn, Claire Brazeau Ω, Claire Chenette ∞  
Percussion, Yuri Inoo Ω  
Percussion, Corey Fogel Ω  
Percussion, Derek Tywoniuk ∞ Ω  
Percussion, Matthew Cook ∞  
Oscillators, Richard Valitutto ∞ Ω

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Please visit <http://discovermam.org/> to learn more about Mayas for Ancient Mayan (MAM), a nonprofit organization that helps indigenous Mayas to learn more about ancient hieroglyphic writing and the calendar.

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