

JAKE BERRAN, Composition

Master's Recital

Wednesday, November 19, 2025

7:00 p.m., Wortham Theatre

PROGRAM

PHREAKED: The Boy Who Broke The Telephone	Jake Berran, composer and librettist	50'
Mom's Intro		
The World In My Ears		
The Phone		
First Call	Avalon Hogans, librettist	
I Made The Phone Hiccup		
Angry Call		
It's Cap'n Crunch		
What Was The Line?	Spencer Rembert, librettist	
Phreaky Teachings (Sea Shanty)		
Calling Everybody		
Neighborhood / Spider Web		
Mom's Outro		

CAST

Joybubbles (soprano)	- Sophia Orrico
Mom (mezzo-soprano)	- Hanna Frampton
Cap'n Crunch (bass-baritone)	- Tzvi Bat Asherah

ORCHESTRA

Isabelle Jamois, flute
Anne Pinkerton-Dion, oboe
Jake Glaser, clarinet
Geoff Hill, electric piano
Max Whittaker, percussion
Asher Lurie, percussion
Fiona Shea, violin
Lisa Kazami, violin
Felix Veser, viola
Benjamin Rodriguez, cello
Lukas Munsell, double bass
Jake Berran, conductor

VIRTUAL CHORUS

Wenshi Chen
Rafaela Doser
Charlie Forster
Nova Gomez
Travis Guillory
Ethan Guok
Naci Konar-Steenberg
Asher Lurie
Ansel Mills
Ella Modan
Benhur Mosazghi
Linshengyi (William) Sun

PRODUCTION TEAM

Angela Ortiz, stage manager
Yu-Shiuan Mei, light board operator
Colleen Doherty, light board programmer
Kolby Garrison, accessibility consultant

SPECIAL THANKS

Chapman Welch
Kurt Stallmann
Aisling Ma
Ravi Nguyen
Gustavo Barreda

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Music.

Jake Berran is a student of Kurt Stallmann.

PHREAKED: The Boy Who Broke The Telephone

PROGRAM NOTES

PHREAKED: The Boy Who Broke The Telephone is inspired by the true story of Joybubbles (1949–2007), who, as a blind boy, used his perfect pitch to hack the telephone signaling systems.

CHARACTERS

Joybubbles – based on Joe Engressia (1949–2007) as a child. Born blind, he discovered he could whistle into his rotary phone at 2600 Hz to hack the phone’s signaling systems. He became one of many “phreakers” (phone hackers), a subculture that would later evolve into computer hacking. Later in life, Engressia renamed himself Joybubbles and declared himself five years old. He became devoted to *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, a key aspect of his late-life “childhood” that is incorporated into his character. The character is not a virtuosic whistler but rather a soprano singer.

Mom – Joybubbles’s mother doubling as the story’s narrator. Caring yet controlling, she introduces him to the phone but enforces rules and limits. She is a fictional character, not based on the real Joe Engressia’s mother.

Cap’n Crunch – A pirate-like phreaker (phone hacker) inspired by the cereal mascot. He wields a 2600 Hz whistle (once included in Cap’n Crunch boxes) and, unlike Mom, encourages Joybubbles’s rebellious curiosity. He is not based on the real phone hacker Captain Crunch (John Draper).

SYNOPSIS

Mom, the narrator, introduces Joybubbles’ life story. The *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* theme plays. Joybubbles, born blind, sings of experiencing the world through sound (“The World In My Ears”). Mom introduces him to the telephone, describing it as a spider web connecting people to each other (“The Phone”).

Joybubbles makes his first call and discovers that singing a high E (2600 Hz) interrupts the signal (“First Call”). Excited, he prank-calls strangers, cutting them off with his tone. Mom warns him about the dangers of breaking the rules and calling strangers, but Joybubbles insists it’s playful and often meaningful. They argue until Mom leaves in frustration (“I Made The Phone Hiccup”).

(continued on back)

Joybubbles continues calling, but people react angrily, and he loses the ability to hit the high E. The soundscape becomes overwhelmed by crashing waves, creaking wood, and Cap'n Crunch cereal commercials until it suddenly cuts out.

Cap'n Crunch answers the phone, introducing himself as a seasoned phone phreak. He shares his number and quickly hangs up ("It's Cap'n Crunch"). Joybubbles forgets it, panics, and reconstructs it through rhyme ("What Was the Line?"). Cap'n Crunch teaches him phreaking tricks through a sea shanty, revealing that 2600 Hz allows free long-distance dialing. He encourages Joybubbles to get his own whistle from a box of Cap'n Crunch cereal ("Phreaky Teachings").

Joybubbles buys the cereal, gets the whistle, and ecstatically dials a chorus of voices. Mom finally sees the good in this "neighborhood" he has built. Joybubbles reaffirms his philosophy of eternal childhood and says goodbye ("Neighborhood / Spider Web").

Mom returns to recount Joybubbles's life story once again, but now reveals his later arrest by the FBI for phone phreaking ("Mom's Outro"). The audience's phones emit a final 2600 Hz tone and hang up, ending the show.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Joybubbles was blind from birth, and it is impossible to accurately represent his character with only sighted performers, directors, composers, and librettists. The necessity of reading music and watching a conductor also clash with accurate stage representation. Therefore, this is a semi-staged production—the vocalists often stand still and sing, and only basic actions are carried out. However, we have been extremely lucky to have the guidance of Kolby Garrison, who is the Accessibility and Training Services Coordinator at the American Council of the Blind. She gave us suggestions to portray Joybubbles a little closer to how he may have acted in real life and avoid common misconceptions. This involved, for example, using touch to confirm the locations of the music stand, chair, and telephone, as well as turning toward scene partners to avoid the stereotype of the "blank stare." After this production, I hope to put *PHREAKED* into an audio-only format, which was essentially the medium of Joybubbles's experience when he got on the phone. Someday, I hope the show can be revised and staged more immersively, with Joybubbles played by a blind vocalist.