

Engagements

Felton — Yetter

The parents of Juliana Felton and Christopher Yetter of 89 Hoe Shop Road, Bernardston, announce their engagement.

The future bride is the daughter of Valerie Felton of 20 Grand Ave., Millers Falls, and the late David Felton. She graduated in 2007 from Turners Falls High School and in 2011 from Westfield State University.

The future groom is the son of Sandra and William Yetter of 604 Greenfield Road, Leyden. He graduated in 2008 from Pioneer Valley Regional School, Northfield, and in 2009 from ATS Operating School.

A Sept. 19, 2015, wedding is planned.



Julianna Felton and Christopher Yetter with Dozer.

Want to tell everyone the good news?

The Recorder charges a fee for engagement, wedding and anniversary announcements. There are no time restrictions for publication on Saturday's Milestones page. Engagements, \$35 up to 8-column inches; weddings, \$50 up to 12-column inches; anniversaries, \$40 up to 10-column inches. Additional column inches are \$10/inch (approx. 35 words per inch).

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Wedding anniversary announcements of 50 or more years are free. So are 100-year-birthday photos and five-generation photos.

Your submission should include a daytime phone number. Photographs must have the names written on the back. Images may be e-mailed to milestones@recorder.com. Announcements that are mailed, faxed or e-mailed must be followed up with a phone call to confirm receipt & payment. You can also call if you have questions: 413-772-0261, ext. 228.

Questions about 100-year birthdays and 5-generation photos should be addressed to Diane Poirier at 772-0261, ext. 252, or dpoirier@recorder.com.

Life & Times

Aberfan: 'An ongoing problem of power & money'

From Page D1

few years earlier, when Laura was 10.

"I would not have even known of it at the time," says Siersema in the living room of the Abbott Street home, where she's lived since 2002. But the haunting images of the song — describing the entire village and coal miners from throughout the area turning out to dig through the rubble for two weeks searching for the young entombed bodies — had stayed with her.

"They worked with their picks all through the day, dug with their shovels and hands, They kept on digging all through the night, in a town called Aberfan."

Siersema's own recording of her mother's haunting song, on her 2003 album, "Love Flows Like the Blood of a River," is accompanied by her piano flowing beneath the surface, suggesting the rainwater that ran into the pile of coal debris above the Welsh mining village.

The singer-composer, who'd studied composition at Berklee College of Music in Boston after first training in nursing in Florida and working for seven years as a psychiatric nurse in New York City, felt the song re-emerge as she grew harmonically — first changing her mother's chords, then gradually re-imagining the 3½-minute song to create her own full-blown composition.

"It became clearer to clearer as I began evolving as a composer and an individual, the significance of it and the full symbolic and personal nature of it," says Siersema, who felt her interests and instrumental composing abilities music emerge when she began performing with a jazz trio about five years ago

"It was evolving. I'd be happy with it for a certain period of time, then I'd realize I've got to tinker with it and do something else. But it took time to know what that was."

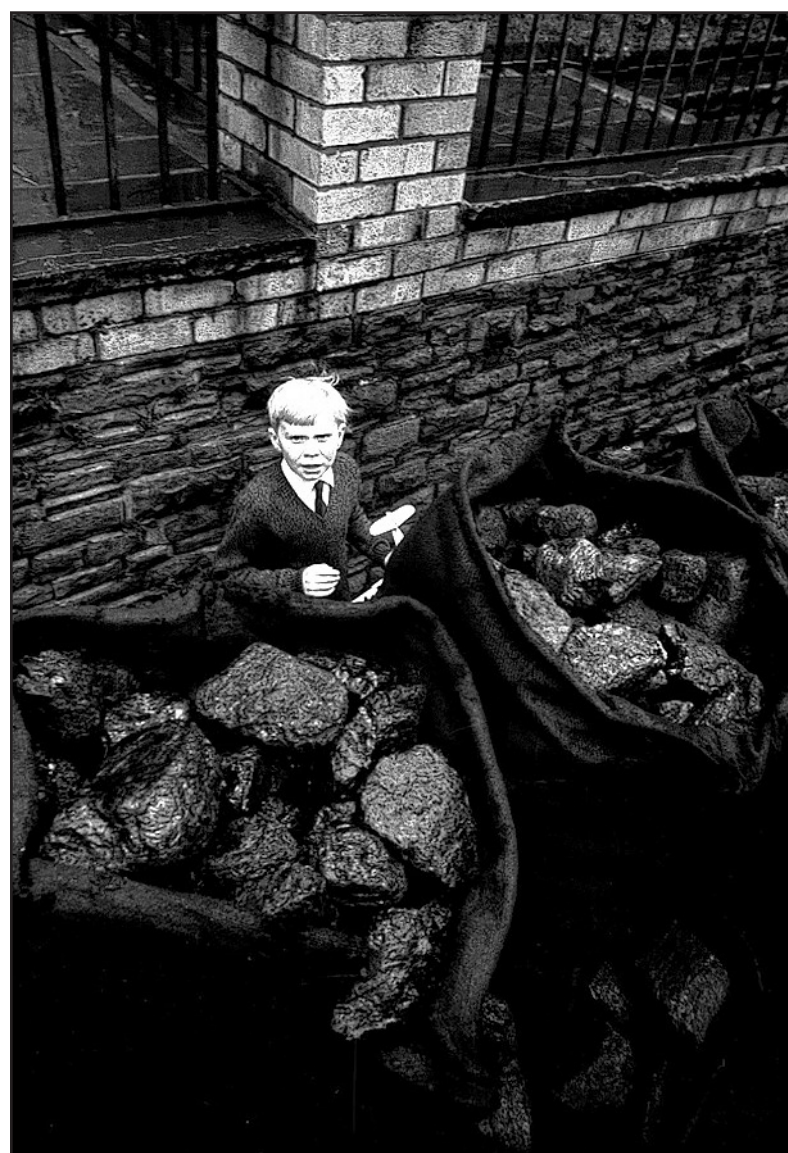
Now a 45-minute-long piece for seven pianos, voice and percussion, Siersema's "Aberfan" has been years in the making and she hopes to make it part of the 50th anniversary observance of the disaster.

Like the rescuers who picked over the rubble, listening for the sounds from possible survivors, the Greenfield musician has felt called to dig deeper into her own soul to expand what by January 2013 had become a 10-minute composition.

Rather than include all of her mother's lyrics, Siersema dove into the heart and soul of what happened in Aberfan, weaving it into her own work, with sections representing rain, sunrise, rubble, rock, trauma and more.

She found on a geophysical blog, for example, that days of heavy rains had stopped on that Friday. She discovered that at the mass funeral, attended by more than 2,000 people, hymns included "Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep" — reductions of which, along with "All Creatures Great and Small" and the song "Aberfan" — she made part of her composition.

The slow movement of chords in the original 10-minute version came to represent, for Siersema, the placement of bodies in the ground. As she revised the work, "in my experience of playing that 'field' sequence, I had to bear being able to play a chord and have it hurt my heart. I couldn't move from that chord until I felt that, and the combination of physical pain, the event



I.C. Rapoport photo, 1966.



Laura Siersema with her random pattern of eighth notes.

and the chord, were all together in the experience. I had to create the experience itself in some fashion in order to transform it, to have it be emotionally related. I've never experienced that before, making a musical decision based on a physical imperative."

Rain, rocks and rubble all move as the elements of rainfall, hymn, trauma, silence and field spiral through a piece Siersema calls "a psychological and spiritual rendering as much as a musical one ... an excavation into my own soul."

Her work's "rain" sequence represents not only a common reality in the British Isles, but also what had flowed through the layers of coal slag, which had rested for years atop highly porous sandstone containing several underground springs. The flowing sequence consists of 144 eighth notes — one for each of each victims — arranged melodically according to a pattern of prime, indivisible, numbers.

for it," says Siersema, quickly interrupting herself. "I take that back: You have corporate negligence, you have the coal-mining industry ..."

And yet, although 116 Pantglas Junior School schoolchildren died in the accident, another 145 survived.

Researchers in 2003 found that 46 percent of those survivors have continued to have nightmares and difficulty sleeping because of the trauma or have other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

If the accident had occurred a few minutes earlier, the students might have still been in the assembly hall rather than in their classrooms on the side of the building nearest the landslide. Had it occurred several hours later, they would have been released for their inter-term vacation. And then there were the two brothers who survived only because they'd been late for school and had entered the playground just as the school was engulfed.

Roots of grief

Siersema also includes "altered interludes" in her piece with different rhythmic emphasis, for an added unsettling emphasis, to be played at different points and in different ways by the seven pianos,

Her splicing, shuffling and rearranging recalls the sifting through the rubble to extract, excavate and extricate the small bodies and their limbs after the avalanche of debris came down.

"Nothing is the same. Every single thing will be altered," says Siersema, emphasizing that in all trauma — whether rape, war, an environmental disaster like Aberfan or the robbing of one's personal identity in childhood — what's left is chaos.

"The rain is altered, rubble, rocks. So, now you have seven pianos playing the part, upside down and backwards, splicing it with rubble, because what you have now is the remains of that coal rock and the continuation of the rain. There are elements of trauma that come up from below. You don't know when that's going to happen. Nor do you know in life when that's going to happen."

The hymns may be a spiritual response to trauma and Siersema manipulates fragments of these tunes as well, just as she uses snippets of her mother's song in a way that's true to her own sense of self.

"It's phenomenal what all this does to a little portion of music, how it resonates, and it connects everything so incredibly well," says Siersema. "Absolutely everything is related."

Circling around and around "that original wound, that thing we all have," the composer has been intent on being honest to the trauma of Aberfan, and her own connection to rescuing those smothered young lives.

"It was crucial to me that I behave with the piece just as the physical event occurred and also my own psychological events," Siersema says. "I was following the piece itself," as it resonated from within.

Her application to Common Capital for grant funding explains,

"A psychological and spiritual rendering as much as a musical one, 'Aberfan' was an excavation into my own soul In composing 'Stillness Variations' (eight solo piano pieces, 2013), prior to 'Aberfan's' final revision, I realized my own entanglement for the first time. In crossing my hands over and under one other to play, my head and my heart became painfully aware of the loss of my own identity suffered in relationship to my mother."

Siersema has begun a \$30,000 fundraising campaign — with about \$1,200 already raised — to produce a studio recording of "Aberfan," using acoustic instruments as well as the sounds of rescue tools. She plans to play all seven piano parts.

The 1966 disaster, which had been forewarned repeatedly by local authorities but dismissed by the National Coal Board, drew public anger. Mountains of coal debris had been building above the village without surveys or plans and with disregard to the underlying springs and the unstable conditions that put the entire village at risk.

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With the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth in time for the 50th anniversary observance, or at a large exhibit in nearby Cardiff, and possibly at the local library in Aberfan. A third stage of the project would allow the recording to be placed in libraries, museums or universities where the trauma of environmental disaster is examined.

"This is an episode that continues today, power and money overwhelming people, corporate irresponsibility, negligence, and victimization of people. This an ongoing problem of power and money predominating and ruining people's lives. Some people are not going to want to hear any of this; and some people won't like what they hear. Some people will be transformed by it. And that's the whole point."

On the Web:

"Photographs of the Aftermath": <http://icrapoport.com/albums/aberwa/#>

Laura Siersema's website for "Aberfan," including music samples and a donation link: <http://laurasiersema.com/music/aberfan/>

Docudrama about the disaster: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-r0IwwTV74>

News footage after the disaster: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ApG9KvGHOD0>

South Wales Police Museum: <http://bit.ly/1BWS4C1>

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