



Songs & Encores

Milton Babbitt
Christopher Berg
Chester Biscardi
Tobias Picker
Mel Powell
David Rakowski

Judith Bettina
soprano

James Goldsworthy
piano

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Songs & Encores

Judith Bettina, soprano · James Goldsworthy, piano

Milton Babbitt

(b. 1916)

- 1 Phonemena** (1969-1970) (3:46)
(voice and piano version)

Chester Biscardi

(b. 1948)

- 2 Baby Song of the Four Winds** (Sandburg) (1994) (3:09)
3 Recovering (Rukeyser) (2000) (5:28)
4 Guru (Ginsberg) (1995) (1:31)

Mel Powell

(1923-1998)

- 5 Levertov Breviary** (Levertov) (1997) (10:29)

Tobias Picker

(b. 1954)

- 6 Native Trees** (Merwin) (1992) (3:28)
7 To the Insects (Merwin) (1992) (3:41)
8 Half a Year Together (Howard) (1987) (1:20)

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Ode on a Grecian Urn by John Keats.

- 9** **When We Meet Again** (Millay) (1985) (2:05)
10 **not even the rain** (Cummings) (1996) (4:12)

David Rakowski
(b. 1958)

- 11** **Musician** (Bogan) (1990) (2:50)
(voice, violin, and piano)
12 **Georgic** (Levin) (2000) (3:33)
13 **Sara** (piano solo) (2002) (3:05)
Three Encores (1991) (4:05)
14 I Vocal Ease (1:09)
15 II Scatter (1:10)
16 III Vocal Angst (1:39)

Christopher Berg
(b. 1949)

- 17** **Ode on a Grecian Urn** (Keats) (2000) (8:21)

Milton Babbitt

- 18** **The Waltzer in the House** (Kunitz) (2003) (2:26)
(voice and vibraphone)
19 **Now Evening After Evening** (Walcott) (2002) (3:40)
20 **Pantun** (Hollander) (2001) (3:14)

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Among the artists featured on this disc there are numerous personal as well as musical connections. Milton Babbitt was one of the first composers to encourage Judith Bettina, while she was still a student at the Manhattan School of Music. She quickly became one of the most eloquent and persuasive advocates for his vocal music, following in the footsteps of such eminent interpreters as Bethany Beardslee. Christopher Berg was a fellow student of Ms. Bettina's at Manhattan School, where he studied with another renowned exponent of Babbitt's music, the composer and pianist Robert Helps, who, like Babbitt, had studied composition with Roger Sessions. Tobias Picker and David Rakowski studied with Mr. Babbitt at Princeton. Ms. Bettina and her husband James Goldsworthy met Mr. Rakowski while the three of them were teaching at Stanford University. For a while Mr. Picker and Ms. Bettina both lived in the same Upper West Side building, and Picker wrote his first song for Bettina in 1984. Living in that very Manhattan building at the same time was the composer David Olan. Mr. Olan introduced Ms. Bettina to Chester Biscardi, who some years later composed a lullaby (subsequently expanded into a longer work, *The Gift of Life*) to celebrate the birth of her and Mr. Goldsworthy's daughter Ariana. On this disc is another piece composed in honor of that event, Rakowski's *Musician*, and Picker's *Native Trees*, composed two years later, is inscribed to Ms. Bettina, Mr. Goldsworthy and Ariana. Another critically important California connection was with Mel Powell, a lifelong friend of Milton Babbitt's. Ms. Bettina had met Mr. Powell at CalArts while performing several of his works there.

These commonalities aside, the stylistic ground traversed by the composers represented here is indeed broad, and it is possible to view their individual songs as points along a continuum, from those exhibiting a relatively diatonic harmonic language that is close to traditional tonality (Christopher Berg, Tobias

Curtis Macomber has for many years been recognized as a leading advocate of the music of our time. He has performed in hundreds of premieres, commissions, and first recordings of solo violin and chamber works by, among others, Carter, Davidovsky, Perle, Wuorinen, and Mackey. As first violinist of the award-winning New World String Quartet, Mr. Macomber performed the standard repertoire as well as numerous contemporary works in performances in major halls throughout the United States and Europe, and, with the Quartet, was appointed Artist-in-Residence at Harvard University. A founding member of the Apollo Piano Trio, he is also a member of the 20th century music ensemble Speculum Musicae. He is a regular participant at La Musica in Sarasota and at the Monadnock Music Festival, and has recorded for Bridge, Nonesuch, Koch, Vanguard, Pickwick, and MHS. Mr. Macomber is a member of the chamber music faculty of the Juilliard School and the violin faculty of the Manhattan School of Music, and has also taught at the Tanglewood Music Center, Taos School of Music and Yellow Barn Music School. He holds his B.M., M.M., and D.M.A. degrees from the Juilliard School, where he was a scholarship student of Joseph Fuchs and winner of the Morris Loeb and Walter Naumburg Prizes.

Cited by the *New York Times* as a "virtuosic percussionist," **Tom Kolor** specializes in 20th and 21st century music, and holds a Master's degree from the Juilliard School. Mr. Kolor has appeared throughout the world as a member of the Talujon Percussion Quartet, Ensemble Sospeso, New Jersey Percussion Ensemble, Newband, and Ensemble 21. He is a frequent guest of Speculum Musicae, The Group for Contemporary Music, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Da Capo Chamber Players, Continuum, New Millennium Ensemble, and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. As a soloist, Mr. Kolor has premiered works by Milton Babbitt, Tania Leon, Wayne Peterson, John Zorn, and dozens of others. Mr. Kolor currently teaches at William Paterson University and Columbia University.

James Goldsworthy has performed in Europe, Israel, Japan, Canada, and the United States, including broadcasts on Austrian National Television, the California cable television show *Grand Piano*, Vermont Public Television, BBC radio, and Minnesota Public Radio. While a Fulbright scholar in Vienna, Goldsworthy participated in German Lieder master classes with Hans Hotter and studied vocal coaching and accompanying with Erik Werba, Walter Moore, and Roman Ortner. He performed in one of the Musikverein 175th anniversary celebration concerts given in the Brahms Saal, and concertized in Vienna, Baden, and Spital am Semmering, Austria. More recently, he performed at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, and at the White House. He has appeared in chamber music concerts including celebrations of Milton Babbitt at The Juilliard School, Weill Recital Hall and Cooper Union, James Levine's Met Chamber Ensemble, and in the Works & Process series at the Guggenheim Museum. Among his many collaborations, he has appeared in recitals with sopranos Véronique Dubois and Edith Zitelli, contralto Marion Kilcher, baritones Anthony Brown and Benjamin Luxon, and violinists Jorja Fleezanis, Lilo Kantorowicz-Glick, and Rolf Schulte. He has premiered works by each of the composers on this recording, and by David Olan, Cheng Yong Wang, and Amnon Wolman. Goldsworthy is currently the Director of the New Works for Young Pianists Commissioning Project. He has taught at Goshen College, Stanford University, and the University of St. Thomas, and is presently on the piano faculty at Westminster Choir College of Rider University. He is also a faculty member of the Chamber Music Conference and Composers' Forum of the East. His other recordings with Judith Bettina are on CRI label.

Picker) to an idiom that at times refers more or less obliquely to tonality but is considerably more chromatic (Chester Biscardi, David Rakowski) to one that is completely chromatic and untethered from tonality (Milton Babbitt, Mel Powell). Despite their differences, however, all of these composers in their unique ways are at root emblematic of a great and continuing lyric tradition in American music.

They are also clearly of one mind in their enthusiasm for the artistry of Judith Bettina and James Goldsworthy. She possesses a beautifully warm voice with a rich, dark-hued yet fiery timbre, and is in command of every musical and verbal inflection; she truly inhabits these words and their settings. He is master of a dizzying array of pianistic idioms and an infinite variety of touch and color; like every fine pianist who collaborates with singers, he understands and embodies what is being expressed in the poetry as well as the music. Together they form a unity in the service of these songs, and one need only spend a few minutes in conversation with them to appreciate the magnitude of their devotion to the creators whose works they champion. That devotion has been amply reciprocated, an assertion easily borne out by the contents of this recording: of the twenty selections on this disc, thirteen were composed specifically for Ms. Bettina. Besides the above-mentioned *Musician* by Rakowski and *Native Trees* by Picker, these include: *Guru* (Biscardi); *To the Insects*, *Half a Year Together*, *When We Meet Again* (Picker); *Georgic*, *Vocal Ease*, *Vocal Angst* (Rakowski); *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (Berg). Dedicated to both Ms. Bettina and Mr. Goldsworthy are: *Scatter* (Rakowski) and *Levertov Breviary* (Powell), while Babbitt's *The Waltzer in the House* bears an inscription to Ms. Bettina and the percussionist Thomas Kolor.

This disc opens with *Phenomena*, by **Milton Babbitt** (b. 1916), a work which has become a signature piece for Ms. Bettina. Mr. Babbitt, who at this writing recently celebrated his ninetieth birthday, has for many years, until his retirement

in 1984, taught at Princeton University, becoming the William Shubael Conant Professor of Music in 1960. He joined the composition faculty of the Juilliard School in 1971. His vocal music has become intertwined with Judith Bettina's career, and he has been closely connected with several of the composers heard on this recording. Because his name is also inextricably linked—as both theorist and composer—to the twelve-tone system, as well as to electronic composition, it is easy to forget that the fundamental impulse behind most of his music, irrespective of medium, is a profoundly lyrical one, and that he has enjoyed a fruitful relationship with great poetry and text setting throughout his life. Like his colleague Mel Powell, he became enamored of the popular music of his youth, and possesses an encyclopedic knowledge of the music and lyrics of virtually the entire Tin Pan Alley canon up to about 1940—not just the choruses of the songs but the verses as well. As a young man he wrote a number of songs in the Broadway vernacular of the era, and in 1946 composed a full-length musical, *Fabulous Voyage*, based on Homer's *Odyssey*. His text setting, even in his more abstract works for voice, reveals a fleetness and rhythmic verve that reflects not only his vast experience with American popular song, but also his own inimitable style of extempore public speaking, which dazzles as it displays the rapidity and sheer brilliance of his thought process. Despite the strictness of his compositional procedures, particularly with regard to rhythmic structure, rigor in his case never equals rigidity.

Dedicated by its composer “to all the girl singers I have known,” *Phonemena* is heard here as originally scored for voice and piano in 1969. The composer realized a version for soprano and synthesized tape in 1975. Its “text” consists purely of phonemes, described by Babbitt as having been “chosen for such acoustical properties as formant frequencies, envelopes and durations, and compounded and concatenated in the use of the voice as a structural timbral ensemble

Judith Bettina, born in New York into a musical family of both a professional violinist and violist, began championing the music of contemporary composers she believed in while still a student at the Manhattan School of Music. Throughout her career, she has had a dedication and commitment to the composers of her generation. She has appeared as guest soloist with such orchestras as the Houston Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the American Composers' Orchestra, and the Munich Philharmonic. She has performed with chamber groups throughout the United States and Europe, including guest appearances with the Bach Chamber Soloists, The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, The Met Chamber Ensemble, Bard Music Festival, The Geneva Music Festival, New York Philomusica, Cygnus Ensemble, Parnassus, Speculum Musicae, Ensemble 21, San Francisco Contemporary Chamber Players, the International Viola d'amore Congress, and invitational concerts at the Library of Congress. Recognized for her performances of contemporary music, Ms. Bettina has had works written for her by Milton Babbitt, Mel Powell, Tobias Picker, Christopher Berg, Chester Biscardi, David Rakowski, Lori Dobbins, Richard Karpen and David Olan. In addition, she has premiered many works including compositions by Charles Wuorinen, George Tsontakis, Richard Danielpour and Vivian Fine. Ms. Bettina's performances have included *Symphony No. 2: Aussöhnung* by Tobias Picker with the Munich Philharmonic and James Levine conducting, Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* with conductor Robert Craft, *La vie en rouge* by Edison Denisov with Boston Musica Viva, and Milton Babbitt's *From "The Psalter"* with the American Composers' Orchestra. Ms. Bettina's recording of *Philomel* and *Phonemena* by Milton Babbitt can be heard on Neuma, *The Head of the Bed* can be heard on New World Records, and *Strand Settings* and *Die Violine* by Mel Powell are on Musical Heritage Society. Her recordings with pianist James Goldsworthy of *The Gift of Life* by Chester Biscardi, David Rakowski's *Three Songs on Poems of Louise Bogan*, and a release of songs by Otto Luening are on Composers Recordings, Inc. Her other recordings are on Harmonia Mundi and Wergo.

Pantun

John Hollander

[*The End of Darkness*]

Dawn, and the clouds start running in the wind:
A single star divides the distant hill.
If I could touch her picture in my mind
The dimming world would grow invisible.

[*Shining Drops*]

Bright jewels drop upon the grass,
Drop in the grass and sparkling lie.
Love is like dew on blades of grass,
Vanishing when the sun is high.

[*At Tanjong Katong*]

This water at the shore's the blue
Mirror of young eyes and bright.
Even next door I long for you,
Even more when you're out of sight.

[*Divergence*]

The road goes right, the road goes left,
Around the same small clump of pine.
Do not write, do not send a gift:
Your longing stays the same as mine.

[*Night Music*]

A splashing drop, another drop
Of water from the bowl I touch.
Somewhere near midnight I start up
And weep in the pillow that I clutch.

within the total musical ensemble....” In Ms. Bettina’s performance, the result is extraordinarily witty and elegant. The syllables, unfettered from meaning, take on the air of what could be construed as an animated monologue, the recounting of an amazing anecdote, or even the bare inflective outline of the astonishing multifariousness and complexity of Babbitt’s thought, as made manifest in his matchless locution.

Chester Biscardi (b. 1948), a New York City-based composer originally from Wisconsin, is Director of the Music Program at Sarah Lawrence College. His education included studies in English and Italian literature, which partly accounts for his highly discerning taste in poetry. His literary interests have inspired not only his choices of texts for vocal setting but often have provided the impetus for his purely instrumental works. As a composer he has managed to carve out a language that is at once exacting in every detail and direct in emotional impact. An exquisitely modulated suppleness of rhythm contributes to the natural declamation of the words, and—despite the meticulous care lavished on each nuance—to an ease and freedom in the unfolding of the melodic line. His harmonies, while sophisticated, sound familiar, yet fresh and vibrant.

Baby Song of the Four Winds was composed in 1994 in celebration of the birth of Graham Everett, son of Biscardi’s friends Carole and C. J. Everett. Carl Sandburg’s poem calls forth in this setting music of effortless grace and myriad subtleties. This lullaby is written, somewhat unusually, from the perspective of the baby, who addresses the four winds, inviting them to be his companions. The gentleness of the winds of the South and West is supported by a gentle oscillation between two pitches, D and E, in the piano part, which serves to underline the phrase, “rock me.” The most striking departure in the poem, “North wind, shake me where I’m foolish./Shake me loose and change my ways,” is mirrored by an

abrupt shift to music of a much more chromatic and skittish character. At the end, in the composer's words, "the East wind brings comfort to this cycle of wakefulness and sleep."

A very different view of wakefulness and sleep confronts the listener in *Recovering*, built on two poems of Muriel Rukeyser: two lines from "The Poem as Mask: Orpheus" and the entirety of "Recovering." Biscardi here achieves a remarkable poignancy through economical means: the use of repeated tones in the vocal line, supported by masterful changes of harmony, serves to conjure up everything from fitful, uneasy slumber to emotional numbness to gradual emergence from the pain of grieving. An altered quotation of a Bach chorale, "*Es ist das Heil uns kommen her*" ("Now is to us Salvation Come"), filtered through the scrim of a dreaming state, frames the setting of the second poem. *Recovering* was composed for another friend of the composer, the tenor Thomas Young, in memory of Young's wife, Marilyn Helinek.

Guru is a setting of Allen Ginsberg that in a few succinct strokes—comprising slightly over ninety seconds of music—perfectly conjures up, in Biscardi's words, "those city and interior landscapes that only Allen Ginsberg could write about in such a unique way."

Mel Powell (1923-1998), like many twentieth century American composers, led a richly varied life in music—and had more than a passing interest in at least one other field: baseball. For a time he played on a semi-professional basis, until a serious injury to one of his fingers compelled him to choose between athletics and a musical career. He studied classical piano as a child, but in his teens, he heard the legendary pianist Teddy Wilson, and jazz became his passion, ultimately leading to stints as pianist and arranger with the Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller bands, as well as with such luminaries as Earl Hines and Django Reinhardt.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The Waltzer in the House Stanley Kunitz

A sweet, a delicate white mouse,
A little blossom of a beast,
Is waltzing in the house
Among the crackers and the yeast.

O the swaying of his legs!
O the bobbing of his head!
The lady, beautiful and kind,
The blue-eyed mistress, lately wed,
Has almost laughed away her wits
To see the pretty mouse that sits
On his tiny pink behind
And swaying, bobbing, begs.

She feeds him tarts and curds,
Seed packaged for the birds,
And figs, and nuts, and cheese;
Polite as Pompadour to please
The dainty waltzer of her house,
The sweet, the delicate, the innocent
white mouse.

As in a dream, as in a trance,
She loves his rhythmic elegance,
She laughs to see his bobbing dance.

from *This Garland, Danger* in *Selected Poems: 1928-1958*

Now Evening After Evening Derek Walcott

Now evening after evening after evening,
August will rustle from the conifers, an orange light
will seep through the stones of the causeway, shadows
lie parallel as oars across the long hull of asphalt,
the heads of bumished horses shake in parched meadows
and prose hesitates on the verge of metre. The vault
increases, its ceiling crossed by bats or swallows,
the heart climbs lilac hills in the light's declension,
and grace dims the eyes of a man nearing his
own house.

The trees close their doors, and the surf demands
attention.

Evening is an engraving, a silhouette's medallion
darkens loved ones in their profile, like yours,
whose poetry transforms reader into poet. The lion
of the headland darkens like St. Mark's, metaphors
breed and flit in the cave of the mind, and one hears
in the waves' incantation and the August conifers,
and reads the ornate cyrillics of gesturing fronds
as the silent council of cumuli begins convening
over an Atlantic whose light is as calm as a pond's,
and lamps bud like fruit in the village, above
roofs, and the hive
of constellations appears, evening after evening,
your voice, through the dark reeds of lines that
shine with life.

from *Italian Eclogues* from *The Bounty*

Musician

Louise Bogan

Where have these hands been,
By what delayed,
That so long stayed
Apart from the thin

Strings which they now grace
With their lonely skill?
Music and their cool will
At last interlace.

Now with great ease, and slow,
The thumb, the finger, the strong
Delicate hand plucks the long
String it was born to know.

And, under the palm, the string
Sings as it wished to sing.

Georgic

Phyllis Levin

in memory of Edward Thomas

If walking down a country lane
You stop to look at gathering clouds
And feel your life a prison-house,
Then think of sky

Open as pastures steeped in dew,
Mountains brightening
After thunder passes through,
A feather wavering in the light;

Or think of one
Who made a midnight requiem
From the rainfall

Of falling men,
As he lay unsleeping in mud
Warmer than some.

Ode on a Grecian Urn

John Keats

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!

...

After a tour of duty in the Army Air Force during the Second World War, he attended Yale University, where he studied composition with Paul Hindemith. Powell's earlier works reveal a decidedly neoclassical orientation, but his later discovery of Webern had a profound and lasting effect on his musical direction. From about 1958 onward he embraced an atonal style, tending to favor transparent textures and formal concision, as well as embracing new notational possibilities, extended instrumental techniques and electronic music. He was one of the founders of the California Institute for the Arts, where he spent most of his later career. For roughly the last decade of his life he suffered from a rare neuromuscular disorder, which severely limited his time to compose. In 1990 his *Duplicates: A Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra*, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music.

Levertov Breviary (1997), one of Powell's final works, is based on a selection of nine of Denise Levertov's poems from two collections, *Lake Mountain Moon* (1990) and *Flowers of Sophia* (1992). In 1991 Ms. Levertov had sent Ms. Bettina a limited edition of *Lake Mountain Moon*; Bettina immediately showed it to Powell, hoping that he would consider setting some of the poems for voice and piano. The work was completed in 1996, and prior to its premiere the following year, Bettina and Goldsworthy sent Powell recordings of rehearsals and even performed portions of it for him over the telephone. He was finally able to hear them perform the entire work live for the first time in 1998, at his home in Van Nuys, California. Breviary is a term used in the Catholic Church to refer to the services appointed for each day (Matins, Vespers, etc.) that are recited by members of monastic orders. Levertov's poetry increasingly came to reflect her gradual coming to terms with Christianity, and in its own way Powell's seamless ordering of these poems is loosely suggestive of a kind of liturgical progression. In this case the rite takes place in the open air, as natural beauties such as mountains, moonlight,

rivers and the Milky Way are contemplated as part of the poet's personal devotions and reflections. Part and parcel of this journey is the composer's decision to set the poems with no breaks between them, so that the sense of where one ends and next begins is intentionally blurred, in keeping with the day's slow, steady, imperceptible and inexorable procession.

Tobias Picker (b. 1954) has been a significant presence in American music since the late 1970s, when he first came to prominence as a composer. He has written pieces in virtually every medium, from chamber music to orchestral works (including several concertos) to solo vocal and instrumental compositions, receiving many prestigious prizes and commissions along the way. Most recently, Picker has garnered great acclaim for his four operas, beginning with *Emmeline*, a Santa Fe Opera production, and, most recently, *An American Tragedy*, premiered by the Metropolitan Opera in 2005. His tone poem, *Old and Lost Rivers* is becoming a staple of the American orchestral repertory. Tobias Picker's training, under Charles Wuorinen, Milton Babbitt and Elliott Carter, was rigorous, and early on he became a master of twelve-tone technique, but his own distinctive musical language has gradually moved toward tonality. Still informed by the experience of writing twelve-tone music, Picker's music is now also infused with the influence of musical practices of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, reconciling the music he grew up studying with the modernist approaches of the latter twentieth century.

The five songs offered here demonstrate a marked affinity for dramatic characterization and a capacity for capturing a mood with a striking economy of means. *Native Trees* touchingly evokes the breathless inquisitiveness of a child, filtered through an adult's memory. The placid D-flat major of *To the Insects* is handled in subtle yet arresting ways, with melodic resolutions never occurring quite where expected. Note particularly the exquisitely calibrated major-minor clash, at

Half a Year Together

Richard Howard

Music is one means of telling time
That forces memory
To conjugate the tenses of the mind.
In terms of moving sound:
When I hear music, all I was I am.
Love, I think, has something of the same
Effect, the other way
Around, permitting what has not yet been
To come into its own;
With you my love, what I will be I am.

When We Meet Again

Edna St. Vincent Millay

I, being born a woman and distressed
By all the needs and notions of my kind,
Am urged by your propinquity to find
Your person fair, and feel a certain zest
To bear your body's weight upon my breast:
So subtly is the fume of life designed,
To clarify the pulse and cloud the mind,
And leave me once again undone, possessed.
Think not for this, however, the poor treason
Of my stout blood against my staggering brain,
I shall remember you with love, or season
My scorn with pity,—let me make it plain:
I find this frenzy insufficient reason
For conversation when we meet again.

Sonnet xli from *The Harp-Weaver*

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond

E. E. Cummings

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond
any experience,your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which
enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will uncloze me
though i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as
Spring opens
(touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose

or if your wish be to close me,i and
my life will shut very beautifully,suddenly,
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility:whose texture
compels me with the colour of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens;only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands

Native Trees

W. S. Merwin

Neither my father nor my mother knew
the names of the trees
where I was born
what is that
I asked and my
father and mother did not
hear they did not look where I pointed
surfaces of furniture held
the attention of their fingers
and across the room they could watch
walls they had forgotten
where there were no questions
no voices and no shade

Were there trees
where they were children
where I had not been
I asked
were there trees in those places
where my father and my mother were born
and in that time did
my father and my mother see them
and when they said yes it meant
they did not remember
What were they I asked what were they
but both my father and my mother
said they never knew

To the Insects

W. S. Merwin

Elders

we have been here so short a time
and we pretend that we have invented memory

we have forgotten what it is like to be you
who do not remember us

we remember imagining that what survived us
would be like us

and would remember the world as it appears to us
but it will be your eyes that will fill with light

we kill you again and again
and we turn into you

eating the forests
eating the earth and the water

and dying of them
departing from ourselves

leaving you the morning
in its antiquity

the words “we kill you again and again,” that achieves a disquieting poignancy. *Half a Year Together* suggests a kind of ecstatic dance, almost a fantastical waltz that despite its tonal grounding weaves melodic figures that would not be out of place in late Schoenberg. Similarly, *When We Meet Again* imposes a disjunct line against its C major tonality, which is at several moments in danger of unraveling altogether even as the protagonist in Millay’s poem firmly resolves not to allow the passion of the moment to overwhelm her reason. A plaintive, modal G-sharp minor underpins *not even the rain*, Picker’s intensely affecting setting of one of E. E. Cummings’ quintessential love songs. The idea of the poem as a single outpouring in one continuous breath is reinforced by the pervasiveness of the tonal center, and by evading any conclusive cadences until the very close of the song.

David Rakowski (b. 1958) has taught since 1995 at Brandeis University, where he was recently named Walter W. Naumburg Professor of Composition. He has composed works in many genres, including seventy-two (and counting) piano études, numerous chamber works, songs, and three symphonies. His music is characterized by formal elegance, clarity of phrasing, surpassing contrapuntal and harmonic control, rhythmic élan and genuine wit. Much of his work seamlessly integrates aspects of vernacular idioms, including elements of, among others, jazz, funk and ragtime. Like his teacher Milton Babbitt, he delights in punning titles for his pieces. This predilection for the humorous is often among the first things that listeners come to associate with Rakowski, along with his propensity for and exceptional facility with writing in fast tempos. These are, however, by no means the only salient features of his musical language. There is a very strong current of intense lyricism and harmonic sensuousness as well, and those are clearly exhibited in the selections on this disc.

Originally composed in 1990 as part of *Six Bogan Poems*, for soprano,

string orchestra, harp and celesta, *Musician* was arranged later that same year by Mr. Rakowski for voice, violin and piano at the request of Judith Bettina. The sensual, erotic undercurrents of the poetry are mirrored in the intimate interplay between the voice and the violin.

Georgic, dating from 2000, sets a poem given the composer by its author, Phillis Levin. The spare opening texture in the piano, which pervades most of the piece, has a meandering quality suggestive of “walking down a country lane.” The lightly flashing octaves sprinkled throughout could imply distant flashes of lightning in the darkening sky, portents perhaps of the war and devastation alluded to in the final stanza. There is a quotation from the thirteenth century hymn *Dies iræ* in the vocal line (shadowed by the piano) at the words “Who made a midnight requiem/From the rainfall/Of falling men.”

Sara Doniach was a greatly admired pianist and teacher who lived in Palo Alto, California. A close friend of Ms. Bettina and Mr. Goldsworthy, she commissioned David Rakowski on two occasions to compose pieces suitable for her pupils. In 2002, as a memorial for her, Bettina and Goldsworthy asked Rakowski to compose this brief and eloquent elegy for solo piano. *Sara* is approximately three minutes long, and is cast in what is essentially an ABA form, with a somewhat more active and intense middle section. The principal melodic material is a rising major sixth, heard at the outset of the piece.

The *Three Encores* are vocalises, composed in 1991. *Vocal Ease* and *Vocal Angst* explore long lines and achingly beautiful harmonies; *Scatter* is the lone example on this recording of Rakowski’s lighter, jazz-inflected style, an homage to “scat-singing,” replete with a favorite rhythmic device of his, “swing eighths.” *Scatter* also shows the composer indulging in a favorite compositional pastime, that of deriving melodic material by mapping the letters of dedicatees’ names

Dreaming the sea that
I have enough depth
I have my pools, my bowls
into and fill, but I must
vanish at last in greater flood
follow my task,
the calling sea.

lies beyond me
to know I am shallow.
of rock I flow
brim my own banks, persist,
yet still within it
dreaming towards

Here comes the moon,
bright rim
slicing importantly
through windrows of
grey thistledown cloud just losing
their sundown flush.

In this dark I rest,
unready for the light which dawns
day after day,
eager to be shared.
Black silk, shelter me.
I need
more of the night before I open
eyes and heart
to illumination. I must still
grow in the dark like a root
not ready, not ready at all.

Moon, wisp of opal fire, then slowly
revealed as orb arising,
still half-hidden; the dark
bulk of the wooded ridge defined
by serrations of pine and fir against
this glow

that begins to change

from lambent red to a golden
pervasive mist of light as the whole
fullness of moon
floats clear of the hill.

The moon was white
in the stillness. Daylight
changed without moving,
a hint of sundown
stained the sky. We walked
the short grass,
the dry ground of the hill,
beholding
the tinted west. We talked
of change in our lives. The moon
tuned its whiteness a tone higher.

from *Lake Mountain Moon* and *Flowers of Sophia*

Guru
Allen Ginsberg

It is the moon that disappears
It is the stars that hide not I
It's the City that vanishes, I stay
with my forgotten shoes,
my invisible stocking
It is the call of a bell

Primrose Hill, May 1965

from *King of May: America to Europe (1963-1965)*

Levertov Breviary
Poems of Denise Levertov

(**Elusive; Effacement; Morning Mist; Milky Way;
River; Taking Charge; Eye Mask;
October Moonrise (1); On the Eve**)

The mountain comes and goes
on the horizon,

a rhythm elusive as that of a sea-wave
higher than all the rest, riding to shore
flying its silver banners—

you count to seven, but no,
its measure
slips by you with each recurrence.

Today the mountain
is cloud,
pale cone of shadow
veiled by a paler scrim—

majestic presence become
one cloud among others,
humble vapor,
barely discernible,

like the archangel walking
with Tobias on dusty roads.

The mountain absent,
a remote folk-memory.

The peninsula
vanished, hill, trees—
gone, shoreline
a rumour.

And we equate
God with these absences—
Deus absconditus.
But God

is imaged
as well or better
in the white stillness

resting everywhere,

giving to all things
an hour of Sabbath,

no leaf stirring,
the hidden places

tranquil in solitude.

Sky-wave breaks
in surf, and leaves
the lace of it to border
an obscure, ethereal,
sinuous coastline—

phosphorescent for that lingering
instant which is to us
time immemorial.

onto the chromatic scale. “Judy” translates to A, A-flat, E-flat, C, and “Jim” to A, G-sharp, C.

Christopher Berg (b. 1949) is self-taught as a composer, though he claims Robert Helps, Noel Ferrand and Richard Hundley as his compositional mentors. Songs and other vocal music comprise the majority of his *œuvre*, and early twentieth century French composers, above all Ravel and Poulenc, as well as Virgil Thomson, Holst and Delius have exerted a profound influence on his music. In addition to his musical activities he has studied drama and worked professionally as an actor. His taste in literature is far-ranging, including Goethe, Auden, Nabokov, Stein, O’Hara, Ferlinghetti, Wilde, Whitman, and Mallarmé, and he has set to music poetry by all of these as well as numerous others. He has composed an opera on Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*, as well as music for orchestra, chamber ensembles, solo piano and incidental music for theatrical productions.

Berg was inspired to set Keats’ famous encomium by hearing its first line—“Thou still unravish’d bride of quietness”—quoted in a lecture by the poet Kenneth Koch. Straightaway he began planning the work, in which he sets all but two of Keats’ stanzas. A straightforwardly leisurely and lyrical setting that builds in intensity and relaxes, coordinating its respiration with that of the poem, its most striking moment is perhaps at the very end, where the famous last lines, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, ’—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” are set to some of the most subtle, enigmatic (and ultimately unresolved) harmonies in the entire song. The piece was jointly commissioned, for Ms. Bettina by Mr. Goldsworthy and also, by the organization *Joy in Singing*.

The final group of songs on this recording brings us back full cycle to the music of **Milton Babbitt**. Babbitt’s taste in poetry is of a very high order indeed, and is very much in evidence in this selection of pieces. The delicate skittering

of the vibraphone part in his setting of Stanley Kunitz's "The Waltzer in the House" beautifully evokes the scampering of the well-pampered mouse. This song and the next, *Now Evening After Evening*, with poetry by Derek Walcott, were both composed for the Works & Process series at the Guggenheim Museum. Despite certain surface similarities—such as Babbitt's characteristic piano textures—between the Walcott setting and *Pantun*, on a poem of John Hollander, the vocal lines of each more than suffice to convey the emotional worlds of the individual poems, or perhaps more accurately to allow them to emerge unimpeded. Babbitt's sense of prosody is equal to both the languorousness of the Walcott and the pervasive melancholy of "Pantun." Hollander incidentally has been a favorite collaborator of Babbitt's for some years, having written the texts for two of his most substantial vocal works, *Philomel* (1964) and *The Head of the Bed* (1982). *Pantun* was composed in 2000 for the New York Festival of Song.

~ Notes by Hayes Biggs
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Baby Song of the Four Winds Carl Sandburg

Let me be your baby, south wind.
Rock me, let me rock, rock me now.
Rock me low, rock me warm.
Let me be your baby.

Comb my hair, west wind.
Comb me with a cowlick.
Or let me go with a pompadour.
Come on, west wind, make me your baby.

North wind, shake me where I'm foolish.
Shake me loose and change my ways.
Cool my ears with a blue sea wind.
I'm your baby, make me behave.

And you, east wind, what can I ask?
A fog comfort? A fog to tuck me in?
Fix me so and let me sleep.
I'm your baby—and I always was.

from *GOOD MORNING, AMERICA* (1928)

Recovering Muriel Rukeyser

... There is no mountain, there is no god, there is memory
of my torn life, myself split open in sleep ...

from *The Speed of Darkness* (1968) /Clues:
"The Poem as Mask: Orpheus"

Dream of the world
speaking to me.

The dream of the dead
acted out in me.

The fathers shouting
across their blue gulf.

A storm in each word,
an incomplete universe.

Lightning in brain,
slow-time recovery.

In the light of October
things emerge clear.

The force of looking
returns to my eyes.

Darkness arrives
splitting the mind open.

Something again
is beginning to be born.

A dance is
dancing me.

I wake in the dark.

"Recovering" from *The Gates* (1976) *One*