

The Heart Revived

LAWRENCE AXELROD



1. POS METAPHONOS 9:06

J. Lawrie Bloom, bass clarinet
Ensemble Nouvelle Époque
Lawrence Axelrod, conductor

LOVE LETTERS

Lawrence Axelrod, piano

2. Light and impetuous 2:15

3. Tempestuoso 1:12

4. Dolce semplice 1:32

5. Of another era 1:17

6. ...if only 2:39

7. COMMON THREADS 9:53

Marcus Ostermiller, piano

8. NIGHT OF STARS 8:31

Julia Bentley, mezzo-soprano
Ensemble Nouvelle Époque
Lawrence Axelrod, conductor

FOUR POSTCARDS

Lawrence Axelrod, piano

9. Mozart 2:36

10. Valley of the Kings 2:19

11. Mountain/Lake/Reflection 3:28

12. Butterfly 2:00

SAISONS

Scott Ramsay, tenor

Ensemble Nouvelle Époque

Lawrence Axelrod, conductor

13. Sa nuit d'été 3:38

14. Feu d'automne 3:54

15. Le silence uni d'hiver
(Vergers No. 47) 2:59

16. Printemps 2:58

--60:18--

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POS METAPHONOS (1992/2014)

This concertino for bass clarinet and orchestra was written in 1992 and subsequently revised two times, one recasting the solo part for violin and one correcting awkward string writing. The name means "constant gradual change" in Ancient Greek, referring to the development of the three main gestures of the work presented in the first measures of the piece - a large three-against-two figure, cross-string arpeggios in the violins and an ascending arpeggio followed by a lyrical line in the bass clarinet. These gestures appear in different guises and formulations throughout the work; three measures do not pass without one of them appearing. The eight-minute work is a very condensed symphonic form. The opening *Dolce Movendo* presents the orchestra in a usual role of accompanist and supporter of the soloist. This is followed by a *Languido*, where densely intertwining parts in the upper winds allow the bass clarinet to begin underneath and then emerge from the texture. The third section is a fragmented cadenza, with abrupt orchestral commentary on the solo line, leading into the final section, a breathless *Agitato*. The last three measures present the initial three gestures in reverse order - arpeggio, cross-string arpeggio and three-against-two - as the soloist quickly disappears in the upper register in a gentle haze of wind chimes, harp glissando and rushing air from the French Horns.

LOVE LETTERS (2007)

As a composer, it is sometimes hard to know what to do with intense personal experience. Will it translate well into music? Will the result be too personal or manipulative? Does anyone really want to be this close to your inner life anyhow?

This short piano suite is the result of such a personal experience. Each movement embodies a very specific emotion that could have been a letter, or perhaps a letter that was written and then intentionally never sent. One linking factor among the movements that emerged during composition was musical silence: it can feel teasing and playful as in the first movement, expectant and unpredictable as in the second and fourth movements, or gentle and thoughtful as in the third movement.

COMMON THREADS (1990)

This piece was written after viewing the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt for the second time. I sought to express the many conflicting and overlapping emotions I felt from the Quilt - love, pain, anger, sadness, humor - all interwoven with exquisite beauty.

The piece is a set of nine variations, divided into groups of three, each marked by a ritornello of quiet repeated notes with isolated pitches above and below. The opening ritornello was a musical depiction of my seeing the enormity of the quilt - its beauty, its profusion of color, its love and the loss it represents. The variations are like getting closer to an individual panel and seeing its detail among all the others. The ritornello then becomes like (a smaller version of) the "walking theme" from *Pictures at an Exhibition*, taking in the enormity again as you move to the next set of panels. The five note chord that emerges, first before the second statement of the ritornello and then as the basis of a variation at the end, was an attempt to crystallize the heart's response to what I was feeling. The speeded up review of the variations in reverse order at the end was like taking one last look at the quilt before leaving the room.

Common Threads is also the name of an academy award-winning documentary about The AIDS Memorial Quilt. This work is dedicated to all those whose lives have been a blessing but whom we will never know.

NIGHT OF STARS (1995/2015)

I composed *Night of Stars* for the birthday of my good friend and long-time collaborator Liz Norman. I spent a long time seeking out texts for this work; I wanted something ecstatic yet earthy, expressing interpersonal and superpersonal connection with a deep relationship to nature. I first settled on a lovely text by Wordsworth that I had set for a higher voice in a song cycle many years ago. In short order I found that this was not what I needed at this moment and threw out what I had written. After still more searching, I decided to write the text myself. This is the first time I have ever done this. The scope of the song seemed to ask for orchestration, which I did expressly for this recording.

Night of Stars

Poem by the composer

It was a night of stars
 black and brilliant
Of silence that plucked waiting words like crystalline berries,
 turning them to shimmering insubstance;
Of silence so profound that echoes of odd birds and ancient drones
 rose from the expectant earth.

I sought you.

In the word-dust I saw the resonance of your thought;
In the bird song I heard the clarity of your words;
In the held notes, I felt the strength of your song.

It was a night of stars
 blue and beckoning
Of softness entering my willing spirit through velvet pores and smiling eyes;
Of softness so palpable draping over leaves and stones and grass
 in a continuously caressing exhale.

I felt you.

In the gentle knowing I sensed the thrill of your nearness;
In the inviting green shelter I smelled the perfume of your knowing;
In the earth-covering I touched the potency of your shelter.

It was a night of stars
 bright and blissful and buoyant
Of fullness whose expression soared through the spangled darkness;
Of fullness so sacred whose quiet ecstasy sparked each passing second -
 eternal, vulnerable, limitless.

I held you.

In the whirling constellations I felt the pull of your gravity;

In the hushed sanctity I ignited a new sun in your constellation;
In the vast, plush expansiveness I merged into your embracing sanctity.

It was a night of stars.

It

was

you.

FOUR POSTCARDS (2003)

The inspiration for this work came from actual postcards sent to me by friends who had visited various places around the world. The image of the first movement is that of a manuscript of a string quartet by Mozart. The faded yellowed paper gave me the idea for the opening measures, which spread an inner line from the quartet on the postcard across the entire range of the keyboard. Ghost harmonies produced by using the middle pedal of the piano continue this idea of haziness in the more agitated sections. The second movement uses extended techniques inside the piano to suggest ancient Egypt and the temples in the Valley of the Kings. Mount Cook, the highest point in New Zealand is reflected in a small lake at its base is the third postcard. The strong octaves from one end of the piano to the other suggest the massiveness of the mountain, while increasingly frequent interpolations between the octaves suggest the dissolution of the image of the mountain into its reflection in the water. The fourth movement is of an iridescent blue butterfly from the rainforest in Costa Rica. I tried to suggest a gentle fluttering in the piano figures. A quotation from Schumann's Papillons appears several times as a fleeting homage.

SAISONS (2003)

This short cycle for tenor and orchestra is one of three works that I have composed using French texts by Rainer Maria Rilke. While the poet's German works are justly lauded, his poetry in French is less so. His themes, not surprisingly, are similar from one language to another. But, because of their structure and grammar, the French texts are much more direct and immediately understandable. These four poems having to do with the seasons of the year as well as their effects on human spirit seemed like a natural grouping to me, providing contrast in emotional intensity, intimacy and tone.

Saisons

Poetry by Rainer Maria Rilke

I. (Sa Nuit d'Été)

Si je pourrais avec mes mains brûlantes
fondre ton corps autour de ton coeur d'amante,
ah que la nuit deviendrait transparente
le prenant pour un astre attardé
qui toujours dès le premier temps des mondes
était perdu et qui commence sa ronde
et tâtonnant de sa lumière blonde
sa première nuit, sa nuit d'été.

(Her Summer Night)

If with my burning hands I could
melt your body around your heart of love,
ah would the night become transparent
taking it for a delayed star
who always since the beginning of worlds
was lost and who begins its orbit
and touching its first night
with its blond light, her night, her summer night.

II. (Feu d'Automne)

Quel beau feu clair
vous avez allumé au carrefour de ma vie,
quel beau feu clair.
Et comme sa pure force assouvie
fait trembler l'air!

(Autumn Fire)

What beautiful clear fire
you lit in the crossroads of my life,
what beautiful fire.
And how its pure satiated force makes the air
tremble!

Clarté qui tremble de ce feu d'automne
pour être humainement
plus près de nous, plus émue et plus bonne
en ressemblant au temps.

Clarity which trembles from this autumn fire
to be humanly
closer to us, more moved and more good
resembling the weather.

III. Vergers No. 47

Le silence uni de l'hiver
est remplacé dans l'air
par un silence à ramage;
chaque voix qui accourt

Orchards No. 47

The united silence of winter
is replaced in the air
by a warbling silence;
each voice that clings to it

y ajoute un contour,
y parfait une image.

Et tout cela n'est que le fond
de ce qui serait l'action
de notre coeur qui surpasse
le multiple dessin
de ce silence plein
d'inexprimable audace.

IV. (Printemps)

Recommençons, dit la terre, recommençons,
c'est ma seule chance.
Et tout à coup le printemps s'écrie: On
recommence!

Et l'activité partout et l'action,
quelle obéissance.
Et le coeur qu'on voudrait retenir, d'un bond
se relance.

Seulement la terre qui obéit,
sait bien qu'elle tourne en rond,
tandis que nous vers l'infini
nous précipitons.

adds a shape,
and perfects an image.

And all that is only the bottom
of what would be the action
of our heart that surpasses
the multiple design
of this silence full
of inexpressible audaciousness.

(Spring)

Let's begin again, says the earth, let's begin again.
That is my only chance.
And all of a sudden springtime cries: we
will begin again!

And activity everywhere and action,
what obedience!
And the heart that one wanted to hold back, in one leap
revives itself again.

Only the earth who obeys
knows well that it turns round
while we toward hurry ourselves
toward infinity.

(Prose translations by Lawrence Axelrod.)

Ensemble Nouvelle Époque

Violin I

Isabella Lippi, concertmaster
Kathleen Carter
Paul Vanderwerf
Francois Henkins
Jody Livo

Violin II

Renée-Paule Gauthier, principal
Michael Shelton
David Katz
Maria Storm

Viola

Claudia Lasareff-Mironoff, principal
Melissa Trier-Kirk
Benton Wedge

Violoncello

Paula Kosower, principal
Elizabeth Start
Jean Hatmaker

Contrabass

Douglas Johnson, principal
Jonathan Cegys

Flute

Jennifer Clippert
Janice MacDonald

Oboe

Erica Anderson
Anne Bach

Clarinet

Barbara Drapcho
Christie Miller

Bassoon

Lewis Kirk
Hanna Sterba

French Horn

Gregory Flint
Neil Kimmel

Trumpet

Kevin Hartman
Matthew Lee

Percussion

John Corkill
Alex Monroe

Harp

Alison Attar



Lawrence Axelrod is a composer, pianist and conductor, whose musical activities have taken him around the United States, Europe, South Africa and New Zealand. As a composer, Mr. Axelrod has had works done by The Chicago Composers Orchestra, Palomar, Ensemble Dal Niente, Pinotage, The Lincoln Trio, The Duo Ahlert/Schwab, the Ensemble JungeMusik Berlin and The Verdi String Quartet in recent seasons. Most recently, two of his *Brandenburg Fantasias* were premiered by the Chicago Composers Orchestra in November 2014. His music was also included in the Sound of Silent Film project on Gaudi, presented by Access Contemporary Music both in Chicago and at New York's Symphony Space. *Pos Metaphonos*, with bass clarinetist Lawrie Bloom of the Chicago Symphony, and the *Brandenburg Fantasias Nos. 3 and 4* have been premiered by the Chicago Composers Or-

chestra in the past few seasons. His solo piano work *Common Threads* was included in AIDS Quilt Songbook @20 concert in December of 2012 in the Great Hall at Cooper Union in New York City. In the dual capacities of pianist and composer, he performed all-Mazurka programs for several seasons combining classic and newly-composed compositions in this form. Two of these concerts were in South Africa of in May 2008, with other versions of these programs at the University of Wisconsin/Madison, Butler University (Indianapolis, IN) and as part of the Fazioli Salon Series on WFMT. He also opened the Swedish Electroacoustic Music Society's conference with a recital in Stockholm in May 2007, repeating the program in Lahr, Germany a few days later. The Verdi String Quartet have been strong supporters of Mr. Axelrod's music, premiering his *Diary Pieces, Anges et Déesses* (with Ingeborg Danz, mezzo-soprano), and *String Quartet No. 1*, the last for the opening concert of the Vielsaitig Festival in Füssen, Germany in August, 2004. His music was also presented on a portrait concert featuring four works as part of this festival. He was invited to perform a piano recital as part of the Eighth International Festival of Electroacoustic Music held in Havana, Cuba in

March 2000, and returned there in March 2004 to give a second recital. His work for orchestra and tape, *Cassandra Speaks*, was premiered by the San Jose Symphony (CA) in June of 1999 with music director Leonid Grin conducting. A CD featuring Mr. Axelrod's *Six Brandenburg Fantasias*, compositions using the instrumentation from Bach's famous works, was released in October 2013 on the Innova label, garnering significant attention.

Mr. Axelrod is a founder and is current president of the Chicago Composers' Consortium and was a member of CUBE Contemporary Chamber Ensemble. He has attended numerous composition residencies around the United States and in Europe. He has taught a highly successful opera appreciation class in Santa Fe each summer for fifteen years, which has become a springboard for leading cultural travel trips. His teaching experience also includes Music Theory at Columbia College (Chicago, IL), and classes for young people. Lawrence Axelrod received his undergraduate degree from Amherst College and a Master of Music Degree in orchestral conducting from Northwestern University.

www.lawrenceaxelrod.com

www.operaadventures.com

Praised by the New York Times for her "rich sound and deep expressivity," mezzo-soprano **Julia Bentley** has appeared in leading roles (Carmen, Rosina, Dorabella, Despina, and both Rossini and Massenet Cinderellas) from Anchorage to New York since completing apprenticeships with the Santa Fe Opera and the Chicago Lyric Opera, premiered over 100 new works, and been featured as a soloist with orchestras led by George Manahan, Raymond Leppard, Oliver Knussen, Robert Shaw and Pierre Boulez. She performs frequently with Chicago's many fine ensembles, including Contempo, the New Budapest Orpheum Society (whose 2015 recording received a Grammy nomination for "Best Classical Compendium"), the Rembrandt Chamber Players, Fulcrum Point, the Chicago Chamber Musicians, Chicago Opera Theater, the Newberry Consort, the Chicago Civic Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Lyric Opera and the MusicNOW series at Symphony Center with conductor Cliff Colnot. She has appeared to critical acclaim at Weill Hall with Pierre Boulez as the soloist in *Le Marteau Sans Maître*, and recorded on the Albany, Cedille, Centaur and Tintagel labels. She has taught on the faculties of Northern Illinois University, Concordia University, DePaul University, and North Park University, and as a guest at many conservatories of music, working with composition students as well as singers to explore new frontiers of

vocal music. The Chicago Sun-Times writes "Bentley offered an emotional gamut that said as much about the human experience as the acoustics of sound."

A versatile player, **J. Lawrie Bloom** has been heard in recital, chamber, orchestral and concerto appearances on soprano clarinet, basset clarinet, basset horn, and bass clarinet. He began studying piano at four and switched to the clarinet at nine. He continued studies at the Columbus Boychoir School, with whom he toured the U.S., Canada and Japan, singing and playing the clarinet. At that same time he began clarinet studies with Roger W. McKinney. He later studied with Anthony M. Gigliotti, former Principal Clarinet of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

In September of 1980 Sir Georg Solti invited Lawrie to fill the position of Clarinet and Solo Bass Clarinet Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Previous to joining the CSO Lawrie held similar appointments with the Phoenix Symphony, the orchestra of the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Vancouver Symphony, and the Cincinnati Symphony.

Lawrie is clarinetist with the Civitas Ensemble, is a frequent performer on the Winter Chamber Music Festival at Northwestern University and the CSO MusicNow series. He is the founder and Artistic Co-Director at the Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival and the Chesapeake Chamber Music Competition. He has been a featured performer at many International Clarinet Association conferences, the Oklahoma Clarinet Symposium, and taught and performed at the 6th Annual Clarinet Meeting in Lisbon, Portugal. The Civitas Ensemble is resident ensemble at Valparaiso University.

Lawrie has performed at the Ambler, Grand Teton, Ravinia, Skaneateles and Spoleto festivals, and the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York. Lawrie toured with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and has collaborated with the Chester, Mendelssohn and CSO String Quartets, the Chicago Chamber Musicians, and members of the Ridge, Orion and Vermeer string quartets. He has been heard many times in live concerts over the airwaves of WFMT in Chicago, and in live recital for the Australian Broadcast Company. Lawrie is a Senior Lecturer in Clarinet at Northwestern University. He has presented master classes all over the world, and is an Artist Performer for Buffet Group USA, for whom he consults on bass clarinet design, and RICO International, with whom he has helped develop new bass clarinet reeds.

The performances of **Marcus Ostermiller**, lauded as a “contemporary music champion,” have been described as “virtuosic” and “compelling” (Broadway World). Notable public appearances include Hamilton Recital Hall (Denver), the Great Hall at Cooper Union (New York), the Nels-Atkins Museum (Kansas City), Black Box Theatre (New York), Spectrum (New York), and Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall (New York).

Ostermiller holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Denver’s Lamont School of Music where he studied with Alice Rybak, graduating summa cum laude in 2009. Awarded the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Graduate Scholarship to support his graduate studies at New York University’s Steinhardt School, Ostermiller completed the Master of Music degree in 2011 and the Ph.D. in Music Performance in 2015. While at NYU, he studied piano with Deirdre O’Donohue and Anthony de Mare, and wrote a doctoral dissertation, *Musical Responses to AIDS: Meaning and Signification in Two Works for Solo Piano by Robert Savage and Kevin Oldham*.

An advocate for HIV/AIDS treatment and awareness, Ostermiller has produced, hosted, and performed in benefits for organizations such as the Gay Men’s Health Crisis, New York AIDS Walk, Colorado AIDS Project, Regional AIDS Interfaith Network, Bailey House, and the Joshua Gomes Memorial Scholarship Fund. He specializes in the performance of works by American composers who died of complications from AIDS during the late twentieth century. Ostermiller also serves on the Community Advisory Board for the Center for Health, Identity, Behavior and Prevention Studies (CHIBPS), an institute at New York University devoted to HIV-specific behavioral research.

Ostermiller works as a Piano Instructor at the British International School of New York and the Nord Anglia International School of New York. A member of the Executive Board of the Piano Teachers Congress of New York, he serves as Co-Chair of the organization’s annual Honors Program, a youth piano competition that culminates in performances at Carnegie Hall.

Praised by the New York Times for his “impressive, bright-voiced tenor,” **Scott Ramsay** is highly regarded by opera companies and symphony orchestras across North America and abroad for his dynamic performances in repertoire ranging from Baroque and bel canto to the 20th Century. Mr Ramsay is an alumnus of the prestigious Lyric Opera of Chicago’s, Ryan Opera Center, where he thrilled audiences

with his portrayal of Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, opposite Natalie Dessay and under the baton of Jesús López-Cobos. The Chicago Sun-Times proclaimed, "He brought a passionate intensity to the role that matched the fire of Dessay's riveting Lucia." His European debut in the same role quickly followed to great acclaim at the Dublin International Opera Festival. Of his Canadian debut in Verdi's *Requiem* with Sir Andrew Davis and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Globe and Mail declared, "He proved a real find. His *Ingemisco*, *Hostias* and solo in the *Lux Aeterna*, had a sweetness and modest purity reminiscent of vintage Bjoerling and Simoneau."

Mr. Ramsay's numerous symphonic engagements have included solo appearances in Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini* and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* (Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Symphony Hall and Ravinia Festival); Verdi's *Requiem* (Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Rochester Philharmonic, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra); Henze's *Kammermusik 1958* with the St. Louis Symphony; the U.S. premiere of Hiller's *The Destruction of Jerusalem* (American Symphony Orchestra at Avery Fisher Hall); Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* (American Symphony Orchestra, Albany Symphony, Jacksonville Symphony, Pasadena Symphony); Tchaikovsky and Taneyev's *Roméo et Juliette* (Pacific Symphony); Handel's *Messiah* (Nashville Symphony, Pacific Symphony, Duke University Chorale and Orchestra).

CREDITS

Pos Metaphonos, *Night of Stars* and *Saisons* were recorded June 2, 2015 at the Music Institute of Chicago, Rob Waller, engineer. Further editing was done by Mat Prock. *Love Letters* and *Four Postcards* were recorded at EMR Studios in Chicago October 5, 2015, Eric Roth and Mat Prock, engineers. *Common Threads* was recorded October 12, 2015 at the National Opera Center in New York, Gloria Kaba, engineer.

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