

A close-up portrait of a woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing bright red lipstick. The background is a dark, textured blue with a white brushstroke effect on the right side.

**LAURA
STRICKLING**
SOPRANO

**JOY
SCHREIER**
PIANO

Confessions



ANDELAIN
A YARLUNG RECORDS COMPANY

RANDY BELLOUS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

**LAURA
STRICKLING**
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Confessions

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Confessions

I love singing and I love song.

Not a surprising declaration for a singer, you might think. But why song, in particular?

First: Words matter. When a composer sets beautiful and important words to music, we hear, understand, and internalize them in a different way than we do when we read them or hear these words as speech. In the course of any recital the audience learns something about who I am as a singer, but also who I am as a person – what I believe, what moves me, my insecurities, my struggles, my fears, my hopes, what makes me happy.

Second: Connection and communication are essential to the human experience. In opera there are costumes, cast, orchestra, conductor, elaborate sets, staging, and blinding spotlights. The composer, librettist and director determine the narrative and the cast shows the story to the audience. But in a song recital, singer and pianist share a narrative they craft through their repertoire choices and offer this narrative directly to the other people sharing their space in a concert hall, or in a room listening to a recording like this one. Song requires a commitment to honest interpersonal communication and invites an audience to participate in a group intimacy people tend to avoid these days. It is far easier to hide at home behind our technological devices.

Song served as one of the most important building blocks of western civilization. “The Bard” in the Ancient Greek world sang Homer’s epic poems for small groups of people, probably accompanied by a simple stringed instrument like a lyre. All of our best research indicates that the Sumerian Gilgamesh Epic, give or take 1,000 years earlier than Homer’s Iliad, was also likely sung, not recited. Like the contemporary songs on this album, these ancient texts shared material that was intensely personal and timelessly universal – detailing the inner world of the protagonist, revealing hopes, insecurities, fear, and longing.

Homer knew what he was doing. So did Shakespeare. Ophelia’s distress has resonated in our hearts since the 16th Century. Have you experienced self-doubt? Worried that you are not attractive or outgoing enough? Mourned deeply with primal pain or rage? Struggled to return a pint of ice cream to the freezer? Coveted a luxury item? Reveled in athletic achievement? Had a love affair that blossomed, faltered, and ultimately failed? This collection provides a window into my soul – in some cases confessions that I could never speak aloud to a room full of strangers, but will sing unreservedly. Hopefully these words and stories will resonate with you. Perhaps you will recognize something of yourself in these songs. Or maybe you will feel a deeper understanding of the experiences of others.



Joy Schreier, piano

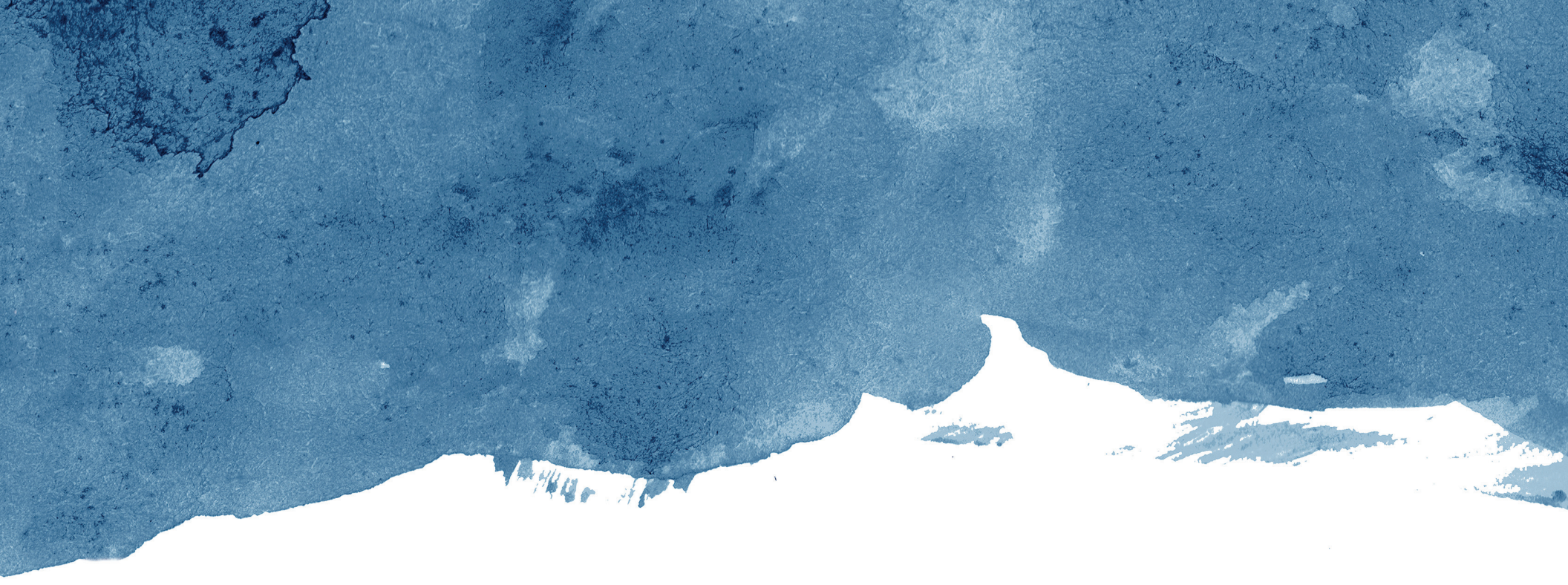
This recording is the result of an important web of relationships and collaborations that have not only informed my development as an artist but have each, in their own way, helped me build and establish my career. I met **Joy Schreier**, the virtuoso pianist performing with me on this album, in 2008. Since then we have given concerts everywhere from a Carnegie Hall recital stage to the homes of song aficionados filled to bursting with their song-loving friends. We've won and lost competitions together. We trade baking recipes and share an obsession with designer gowns for the concert stage. My friendship with Joy means as much to me as her unparalleled skill and sensitivity at the keyboard.

Composer **Amy Beth Kirsten** and I went to graduate school together at Peabody. I have a visceral memory of the first time I heard something she wrote and knew I had to sing it. I met **Tom Cipullo** when he served as a judge at my first major recital competition. We became friends over time and our collaborative relationship has been one of the most important in my life. I love to sing his rapturous music and I absolutely adore him as a person. I became familiar with **Gilda Lyons'** songs as a result of my professional association with a preeminent interpreter and promoter of American art song, tenor **Paul Sperry**. Gilda's vocal writing strikes with immediacy and authenticity. She is a wonderful singer and performer herself, and is intimately aware of what and how singers want to sing. I met **Libby Larsen** at Songfest in 2011 and she recommended me for my first engagement with the Brooklyn Art Song Society. I don't think I would be the singer I am today without Libby's music or her encouragement. Her laugh is infectious and her commitment to her craft and to the music community is an inspiration and model to us all. Coincidentally, it was that same evening at the Brooklyn Art Song Society when I met **Michael Djupstrom**, who just happened to be turning pages for the pianists. I immediately recognized Michael's ***Three Teasdale Songs*** as important additions to the modern song canon. Joy Schreier heard **Clarice Assad's *Confessions*** first and told me they were "meant for me." Joy was right! Building a friendship with Clarice has been a delight. She exudes music and rhythm, and I don't think she takes an unartistic breath. I strive to achieve her level of vision.

And **Bob Attiyeh** at **Yarlung Records** – I remember our first phone call six years ago to plan our initial recording project together (**James Matheson**). It became clear very quickly that we were kindred spirits dealing with the vagaries of music-making and culture. When you find a friendship in a professional relationship like that you do not let it go. You keep dreaming and planning together. And here we are again on Yarlung's sister label!



Taylor, Elizabeth and Laura Strickling, St. Thomas, 2020



I had the idea for this recording five years ago as I pulled together the threads of these important relationships and voices. Much can happen in a life in five years. My husband had just completed his tenure in Kabul as the founding director of the School of Law at the American University of Afghanistan. He found a job in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and we moved from a war zone to St. Thomas, trading persistent fear of unexpected violence for “paradise.” But paradise is an elusive thing, no matter how blue the seas and skies. Four years ago we had a (thankfully healthy) baby in the middle of a Zika pandemic in the Caribbean. A year later we survived Hurricane Irma huddled in a basement and escaped our ravaged island home five days later by catamaran to Puerto Rico, then to Chicago by plane tickets secured by a friend to whom I will always be indebted, when flights away from Puerto Rico in the shadow of the looming Hurricane Maria were hard to find. We arrived in Chicago with the possessions we could fit in our backpacks to take refuge with family for seven months until power and water had been restored at home. My mother was diagnosed with cancer a week after we arrived in Chicago, and I was there to take care of her through surgeries and radiation. I always found Gilda Lyons' *A Mother's Lament* sad and beautiful, but when my husband and I lost a pregnancy last year the words were exactly those I needed to sing as I processed our grief.

Taylor and Laura Strickling in Kabul, 2015



At the same time, these past five years have been some of the most rewarding and transformative of my career. I've learned more about myself and my own mother by becoming a mother. I reached 20 years (and counting) of partnership with the most supportive, kind, intelligent man on the planet, my husband Taylor. The singer who began planning this album is a different person than I am today, and this recording reflects this evolution. More anxiety, more resilience, more hope. More faith in the power of community and relationships to overcome destruction and pain. More dedication to pursuing and spreading joy. More belief in the power of music to unite people.

This recording was partially funded by a PSC-CUNY Grant from the Research Foundation of the City University of New York. Except for Tom Cipullo's cycle *How to Get Heat Without Fire*, these are all world premiere recordings. I am honored to bring a wider audience to these brilliant works from my friends, these wonderful composers.

In addition to expressing my appreciation for my composer friends who share their art with us on this album, I want also to thank the people and institutions who brought these songs to life. Commissioning new music sustains us, and the people who support these new works fuel the richness of our living musical culture.

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Carnegie Hall commissioned Clarice's *Confessions*. Two Sides Sounding: **Eleanor Taylor**, voice and **Jocelyn Dueck**, piano, commissioned and premiered Gilda's *Songs of Lament and Praise* at the Saint Peter's Church Concert Series in New York City. Joy in Singing and the Lincoln Center Library sponsored Tom's *How to Get Heat Without Fire*, which the composer premiered on the piano with soprano **Jody Sheinbaum** in April, 2000 at The Great Hall at Cooper Union in New York City. Amy's *To See What I See* premiered in a concert by **Catherine Green** at Peabody. Michael's *Three Teasdale Songs* had multiple parents. The Lotte Lehmann Foundation commissioned *I Would Live In Your Love*, and soprano **Kimberly Walton** commissioned *Absence* and *Spring Rain*. Kimberly and pianist **Ji-Young Lee** premiered the three-song cycle in May, 2010 at Brooklyn College in New York. Soprano **Carol Eikum** commissioned *Righty, 1966* from **Libby Larsen** for Carol's "*Diamonds in the Rough: a recital about baseball and life.*" Carol Eikum, **Charles Kemper** (piano) and **Michelle Antonello Frisch** (flute) gave the premiere in 2007.

Thank you Clarice Assad, Bob Attiyeh, Kristina Bachrach, Jean Barr, Michael Brofman, Phyllis Bryn-Julson, Tom Cipullo, Elizabeth Daniels, Elspeth Davis, James & Elizabeth Dixon, Michael Djupstrom, Erin Freeman, Michele Frisch, Doug Guiles, Sydney Hans, Marilyn Kallet, Amy Beth Kirsten, Libby Larsen, Ruth Locker, Susan Clark Manns, Sarah Eckman McIver, Daniel Merceruio, Laurence Morton, Emily Peterson-Cassin, Ed and Jan Puckett, George Rico, Rosemary Hyler Ritter, Chanelle Schaffer, Ann Schein, Jeff, Tristan and Eliane Schreier, Ken and Marlene Schreier, William Sharp, Daniel Shores, Paul Sperry, Ann Strickling, Janet Strickling, Lawrence Strickling, Taylor and Elizabeth Strickling, Carrie Sykes, and Meghan Walther.

In closing, I would like to dedicate this album to **Janet Strickling**. She believed in me and supported this project, but succumbed to the Covid-19 virus before I was able to play this recording for her. The memory of her sweet, shy smile will be with her family always. Thank you, dear Aunt Janet.

–Laura Strickling

CONFESSIONS

What Will They Think?

Composer **Clarice Assad**

Text by **Naomi Major**

What will they think if I say the wrong thing? What will they think if I'm laughing too loud and don't know? Oh, how I wish I didn't care so. What will they think? I always wonder. What will they think if I am wearing the wrong dress, if I arrive at the wrong time, if I am not in the right place, or if I shouldn't go at all. I look at myself and say, "What will they think?"

Oh, how I wish I could be someone else. Somebody nothing like me. A someone with a gleam in their eye. When she walks in the room everyone sighs. Sometimes I think if I was not afraid then I would have a chance.

In my head my lipstick is red, laugh too loud and never care. I wear feathers in my hair. In my head I have a king-sized bed, kiss men on the sly in the blink of an eye. In my head I am high-spirited. I speak my mind, won't tow the line, my heels are high, I can kiss the sky.

But I wake up and wonder, "What will they think?" I wake up and, ah...

What will they think if I say the wrong thing?

What will they think if I'm laughing too loud and don't know? Oh, how I wish I didn't care so. Sometimes I think if I was not afraid then I could have a chance. Then I would just not care, "What will they think?"

CONFESSIONS *(continued)*

Fixation

Composer **Clarice Assad**

Text by **Alissa McLaughlan** (b. 1977)

I cannot decide if I want cake or pie, I guess I'll just have both. And then I will need to have something with lots of salt. Oh, these cravings of mine taunt me, making my mind possessed! There are so many sinful things to eat!

There is nothing I crave more than my ice cream. Coffee-flavored, nuts, pistachio are always in my dreams. Even when it's cold out sorbet's not a chore. I don't care how full I get, there's always room for more. Until that feeling of guilt infects my peace. Then my strenuous exercise will drastically increase. Aerobics, yoga, and machines, I assume, will surely eliminate the endless pints I have consumed!

I will skip a day of work for homemade cake or pie. Devil's food or flakey apple go from stove to mouth. Sweets are meant to share but I don't ever care. At my local bakery I have my own affair. Never fully satisfied I always go for more. But then I hear that nagging voice I totally deplore. I try to block it out but it's so hard to do when the proof of all your crimes are all in front of you.

Ah, I feel so melancholy. My cravings run my life. Such seductive treats that I cannot resist!

Do you know how it feels to eat so much ice cream? Of course the flavor I can't find is the one I need! No matter how late at night I'll search for you, my love. I don't care how full I get there's always room for more. Aerobics, yoga, and machines, I assume, will surely eliminate the endless pints I have consumed! Endless pints, endless flavors, of endless ice cream I have consumed!



CONFESSIONS *(continued)*

Turn Back The Clock

Composer **Clarice Assad**

Text by **Catherine Maxymuk** (b. 1956)

I cannot believe my eyes. Is this some sort of joke? Perhaps I'm in the twilight zone, perhaps my mirror broke. This isn't me, this cannot be the girl I'm looking at. I'm ultra thin, I'm bones and skin – is that a lump of fat?

Wasn't it just yesterday – my calendar replete with guys who plead on bended knee for us to simply meet? But now I spend my nights at home, repress my appetite. I starve myself, wake up alone, and still have cellulite.

Hide our imperfections trying to fit in. Why can't we accept it? Ladies we will never win.

I'd like to have a chat with Eve to tell her once or twice of all the women since her time and how we've paid the price. If only she had known back then what history would reveal. I'm sure she would have fought for us and struck a better deal!

No matter how we women try to make ourselves look great. Admitting while we start to cry, "I'll never get a date!" So then my dear it's crystal clear it's simply understood: Society says, "Turn back the clock," as if we really could!

Hide our imperfections trying to fit in. Why can't we accept it? Ladies we will never win.

SONGS OF LAMENT AND PRAISE

Composer **Gilda Lyons**

I. Eve's Lament

Anonymous (10th century)

There would be no ice in any place,
no glistening windy winter,
no hell, no sorrow, no fear,
if not for me.

II. Deirdre's Lament

Anonymous (12th century)

O man that diggest the tomb,
And that puttest my darling from me,
Make not the grave too narrow—
I shall be soon beside my noble one.
My time should not be long.

III. Hymn To The Archangel Michael

Maelisu ua Brochain,
attributed (11th century)

O thou of
Goodly counsels,
As long as I live do not desert me.
O angel!
O Michael of great miracles,
Bear to the Lord my prayer.
To my soul

Bring help, bring comfort
In this— the hour of its leaving.

I choose Thee,
That thou mayst save my soul,
My mind, my sense, my body.
Hearest thou?

Victorious, triumphant one,
Angelic slayer of demons?

Carry my
Fervent prayer
To the King, to the great King!
O Michael,
Come with many thousand angels
To meet my expectant soul!

IV. A Mother's Lament

Anonymous (11th century)

My hands shake,
My poor body totters,
My breasts are sapless,
My eyes are wet.
My husband has no son,
And I no strength.
Youth without reward,

Birthless sickness,

My breasts are silent,

My heart is wrung.

O great Mary, come to me!

O I am become a crazy woman for my son.

My heart is become a clot of blood.

And Hell! Hell, with this deed, is full!

Heaven!

My sense and my spirit are killed.

Heaven!

Heaven is shut.

V. An Even-Song

Saint Patrick,
attributed (12th century)

May Thy holy angels,

O great King of mysteries,

Guard our sleep, our rest, our shining bed.

Let them reveal true visions to us.

May no demons, no ill,

no terrifying dreams disturb us.

May our watch be holy, our work, our task,

Our sleep, our rest without let, without break.

HOW TO GET HEAT WITHOUT FIRE

Composer **Tom Cipullo**

Text by **Marilyn Kallet**

Why I Wear My Hair Long

I want to wrap it
around you
like a silk shirt

button it
slowly
carefully

facing you
let the fringes
tickle your hips

until we ride
strong silken horses
glued on

& my flag
unfurls
a few strands

sticking
to your
lips.

Saying Goodbye

We embraced, there in the parking lot of the ordinary.
How could I know your arms were arguing last things?
Your cheek in my hair.

For a moment, I pressed against you. Goodbyes can be vast.
In a breath, we traded lives.

I didn't know you were a cliff I had reached the edge of.
Your touch echoed.

I simply followed it like song.

Marilyn Kallet (b. 1946), from *How to Get Heat Without Fire*, NMW, 1996.
Reprinted in *Packing Light: New and Selected Poems*, Black Widow Press, 2009.

HOW TO GET HEAT WITHOUT FIRE (continued)

Composer **Tom Cipullo**

Text by **Marilyn Kallet**

The Pocketbook

"Fluid Italian suede in garnet,"
the copy croons.

I memorize the Bergdorf
Goodman catalogue,
the blonde with garnet lips
carrying my pocketbook
against her slim hip.
970 dollars.

One chunk of my
daughter's college.

After weeks of foreplay
I sell out my family,
dial the toll-free number.
It's miraculously
easy, just "ten working-days"
and here it is, nestled
in a silk carrying-case.
For days I hide it
behind the recliner,
playing peek-aboo,
trying it out when my
husband's not home.

Nothing else in my life's
this beautiful.
To keep it
I would have to buy
silk suits, tweed coats,
a silver Porsche,
house on Park Avenue.
My shoulders are unworthy
of the strap
in wine-red suede,
I would have to have inches
surgically added my height.

"American women carry
their souls
in their pocketbooks,"
Edgar Allen Poe said.
Not just my soul,
my money,
my identity,
my credit cards

This pocketbook soft
and red
as a womb,
room where I would
carry myself in comfort,
be my own mother,
be drunk with color,
970 dollars.

I could sell my
wedding ring,
break into neighbor's
houses--
after two years
in the women's
correctional facility
there it would be
waiting for me,
fluid Italian suede
in garnet,
big enough to carry
the collected works of Poe,
O my fair sister, O my soul.

A note from the composer:
In the poem's original form, Marilyn Kallet ascribed a cost of \$370 to this magnificent handbag. Nowadays, no self-respecting soprano will admit to purchasing a luxury item for so little. Does any worthwhile purse at Bergdorf Goodman come so cheap? Thus, with the poet's permission, the lyrics were changed to reflect the times, substituting the already outdated sum of "\$970." One can only imagine where inflation will take this number in the next decade!

HOW TO GET HEAT WITHOUT FIRE *(continued)*

Composer **Tom Cipullo**

How To Get Heat Without Fire

Beneath the dark floor
there has always been love,
but the trick is
how to get down to it?
Shall I tear my way down
like a tiger clawing
the floorboards, when this tearing
down is what scarred you?
Whose mother is there
in the dark trying hard
to hide you from the memory
of the floorboards in flame?
How to get heat without fire?

To coax light open?
To ease you new into
the world if I am not
a mother, or a beloved?
Pull back? Peel back dead
bark, pull back the boards
we trample, throw each other
down on and through some days?
Turn the floor into a pool
we can dive deep into,
cradle the mothers,
let the animals swim their ways?
Has music ever saved anyone?

Then I will reenter my life as sound,
as notes strung like pearls
that you have yearned to enter.
I will be sound,
I will be sound,
and silence,
listening.

TO SEE WHAT I SEE

Composer **Amy Beth Kirsten**

(from Shakespeare's Hamlet)

OPHELIA:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, the soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mold of form,
The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That suck'd the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;
That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy: O, woe is me,
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!



THREE TEASDALE SONGS

Composer **Michael Djupstrom**

Text by **Sara Teasdale** (1884-1933)

I Would Live In Your Love

I would live in your love as the sea-grasses
live in the sea,
Borne up by each wave as it passes,
drawn down by each wave that recedes;
I would empty my soul of the dreams
that have gathered in me,
I would beat with your heart as it beats,
I would follow your soul as it leads.

Absence

I cannot sleep, the night is hot and empty,
My thoughts leave nothing lovely in my heart.
You love me, and I love you, life is passing,
We are apart.
The August moonlight vibrates with the voices
Of insects and their passions – frail and shrill –
Oh from what whips, oh from
what secret scourgings
All of earth's children bow before her will.

Spring Rain

I thought I had forgotten,
But it all came back again
To-night with the first spring thunder
In a rush of rain.

I remembered a darkened doorway
Where we stood while the storm swept by,
Thunder gripping the earth
And lightning scrawled on the sky.

The passing motor busses swayed,
For the street was a river of rain,
Lashed into little golden waves
In the lamp light's stain.

With the wild spring rain and thunder
My heart was wild and gay;
Your eyes said more to me that night
Than your lips would ever say. . . .

I thought I had forgotten,
But it all came back again
To-night with the first spring thunder
In a rush of rain.

RIGHTY, 1966

Composer **Libby Larsen**

Text by **Michele Antonello Frisch** (James 1:17)

with Sarah Eckman McIver (flute)

When I was twelve
I hung upside down
insides of my knees wrapped
around a lofty branch,

kissed salamanders' skin
and dreamt myself
wet, smooth, spotted,
invisible in the dewy grass,

escaped to far kingdoms,
flashlight under tented covers
filling my head with words and
stories and mysteries and lovers,

punched boys who thought
I wasn't tough,
avoided sissy, girly stuff,
cuffed jeans and most of all,
I could throw.

I could throw
fast, far, true,
step into it
let it fly

arc of elegant geometry
bee-line hurl to third
earnest toss of symmetry

my wing-ed baseball bird.
I could throw 'em out from
near the fence to far
away home plate
or sidearm to the shortstop
sealing runners' fate.

Yeah, I could run and
catch and hit and slide
and snag tough flies
with Dad's-kid pride.

I was the girl in center field
while God in pleasure winked.

A note from the text author:

*"Whatever is good and perfect
comes down to us from God
our Father, who created all
the light in the heavens"*



Laura Strickling, celebrated by *The New York Times* for her, "flexible voice, crystalline diction, and warm presence," has concentrated her concert career more on song recitals than operatic performances. Laura curated *The New Music Shelf Anthology for Soprano*, serves on the New Music Advisory Board for the Brooklyn Art Song Society, and works on the Advisory Council for the Cincinnati Song Initiative. Laura created the role of Fanni Radnòti in the World Premiere of **Tom Cipullo's** opera *The Parting with Music of Remembrance*, and previously collaborated with Yarlung Records on the 2016 album *James Matheson*.

Laura's non-musical life included a year in Fez, Morocco, and three years living in Kabul, Afghanistan where her husband founded the law school at the American University of Afghanistan. Laura was born in Chicago but she and her family currently live in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, where her husband practices law and she is an avid cultivator of orchids and their young daughter, Elizabeth. Laura is represented by **Schwalbe and Partners**. For further information, please visit laurastrickling.com.

Plácido Domingo praised **Joy Schreier** as an "orchestra at the piano" and *The Washington Post* lauds Schreier as a "responsive accompanist" and "ideal support." Joy has performed at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Merkin Hall, the White House, Kennedy Center, Corcoran Gallery, National Gallery of Art, National Museum for Women in the Arts, National Portrait Gallery, Phillips Collection, and concert halls throughout the United States, Europe and Asia.

Joy has performed as official pianist of numerous international competitions, including the Washington International Voice & String Competitions and the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She is Assistant Conductor & Pianist of the Cathedral Choral Society and has served as Assistant Conductor at the Washington National Opera, coach for the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, and Keyboard Artist of the Washington Bach Consort. She earned her Doctorate in Accompanying and Chamber Music at the Eastman School of Music under **Dr. Jean Barr** where she received the Barbara Koeng Award for Excellence in Vocal Accompanying. For further information, please visit joyschreier.com.

Dr. Sarah Eckman McIver performs and teaches in Washington D.C. on flute, piccolo and baroque flute. Her multifaceted freelance career includes performances with Maryland Symphony Orchestra, American Pops Orchestra, Apollo Orchestra, Peacherine Ragtime Society Orchestra, Cathedral Choral Society, Concert Artists of Baltimore, Maryland Winds, Signature Theatre, and in chamber settings with Washington's Camerata Early Music Ensemble.

For twelve years, Sarah toured nationally with the U.S. Army Field Band and now serves as First Sergeant of 229th Army Band, Maryland National Guard. She is Vice President on the board of the Flute Society of Washington, runs a full private teaching studio, and is activities director and stage mom for her three busy children. For more information and links to recordings, please visit sarahflute.com.

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- 3 *Turn Back the Clock*

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Executive Producer **RANDY BELLOUS**

Confessions recorded at Sono Luminus Studios

Recording Engineer: Daniel Shores

Session Producer: Dan Merceruo

Steinway Technician: John Veitch

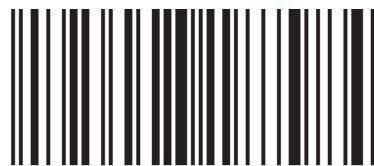
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