



RESONATING EARTH

Carolyn Enger, piano

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1.	Meredith Monk (b.1942) Quarry Waltz	1:58	8.	Philip Glass (b.1937) Etude No. 2	7:50
2.	Marcos Balter (b.1974) l.v.	2:42	9.	Iman Habibi (b.1985) in the brittle quietude	3:10
3.	Nico Muhly (b.1981) LILT	3:43	10.	Caroline Shaw (b.1982) Gustav le Gray	12:33
4.	Wolfgang Rihm (b.1952) Auf einem anderen Blatt	4:34	11.	Sean Hickey (b.1970) The Birds of Barclay Street	3:00
5.	Missy Mazzoli (b.1980) Orizzonte	5:24	12.	John Cage Dream	8:34
6.	John Cage (1912-1992) In a Landscape	7:29	13.	Sean Hickey Reckoning	2:57
7.	John Luther Adams (b.1953) Nunataks	7:34	14.	Meredith Monk Ellis Island	3:21

Total playing time 74:56

Carolyn Enger, piano

THE MUSIC

Resonating Earth, a multimedia project developed by pianist Carolyn Enger in collaboration with producer/video artist Elliott Forrest, visual artist Myles Aronowitz, and photographer/activist J. Henry Fair, is a project with a purpose. The mission statement puts things plainly: “From the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico to coal burning plants in the Ruhr Valley of Germany, from the glorious heights of mountain ranges in Alaska to mountains of potassium waste in Eastern Germany, *Resonating Earth* was created in response to the climate crisis.”

Enger is far from alone in her quest to better the world for us all through the power of her artistry—which brings up a blunt question: What can classical music do about a crisis that has already had devastating impacts on land, sea, temperatures, flora, fauna, and human population? How can a pianist – how can any artist – fight back?

The answer, in this case, involves evolution, of a sort. Enger enjoys the considerable benefit of living outside of Manhattan in a wooden house that enhances the natural vibrations of her seven-foot Steinway piano. Add to that her personal practice of yoga and meditation, and what initially resulted was a project Enger envisioned calling *Resonance*—an antidote to the strenuous hustle and bustle of modern life.

Building that program led Enger to collect a wide range of compositions representing multiple generations and myriad schools of thought, bound together loosely by an affinity for melody, long lines, and space before rhetorical or architectural concerns.

Then, after one particular concert, Enger recalls a sensation of elation growing larger and more all-encompassing. Her love of art, abetted by a successful performance and a generous audience, somehow transformed in an instant into a love for the planet—and a need to express it. Serendipity led Enger to her collaborators, and a project was born.

Here, though, Enger represents that project through music alone—and, surprisingly or not, her motivating sentiment comes through, loud and clear. She begins and ends *Resonating Earth* with music by a composer not closely associated with the piano—or, indeed, with conventional composition. **Meredith Monk**, born in New York City in 1942, is no stranger to artistic activism; her canon, a singular and idiosyncratic fusion of vocalism and theatrical movement, is filled with works that respond in some fashion to global events, social issues, and deeply personal concerns.

Those impulses are present even in the piano miniatures that frame this program. Monk wrote *Quarry Waltz* for an early stage work haunted by the specter of totalitarianism, while *Ellis Island* evokes the promise of freedom implicit in the portal to our nation—a potent symbol to recall at a time when walls are rising and borders closing.

Some selections in *Resonating Earth*, though, have little or nothing to do with social causes, but rather are concerned with creating a sonic environment conducive to openness and contemplation. *I.v.*, by **Marcos Balter**, was commissioned for a 2013 celebration of Ludwig van Beethoven in Chicago. Atop the score, Balter provides a telling indication: “Like a distant memory.” Accordingly, the work is filled with simple, spare gestures whose resonances fade into chasms of silence.

As if in response to Balter's ambiguity, *Lilt* – drawn from a collection of *Fourteen Études* by the prolific young composer **Nico Muhly** – broadcasts assurance in its steady rising fourths and hymn-like melody. The seasoned German modernist **Wolfgang Rihm** seems to vacillate between those extremes of mood in *Auf einem anderen Blatt* (“On a different note”). In reality, Rihm was juggling, in his own words, “a few obscure harmonic chords and two or three forlorn octaves” to celebrate the 75th birthday of Pierre Boulez.

At first brush, *Orizzonte* (“Horizons”) by **Missy Mazzoli** might also seem wholly devoid of any activist impulse, though a listener certainly might imagine a watery impulse behind the undulating sine waves that accompany Mazzoli's romantic post-Minimalism. But when you learn Mazzoli wrote the piece for Hills Not Skyscrapers, a band she had formed in Amsterdam, and that the premiere was played on a piano that had been left out in the rain for a year, the piece assumes new resonances based on that knowledge.

In a Landscape, among the most famous and popular piano works by **John Cage**, provides a tranquil oasis at the heart of Enger's program. Composed in 1948 for dancer Louise Lippold, the music conforms metrically to the structure of her choreography. The other Cage work in the program, *Dream*, was completed that same year for a dance by Merce Cunningham. Using limited pitches and continuous sustain in both works, Cage fashions sonic environments that echo his love for Satie's “furniture music”—anticipating the New Age and ambient-music fashions that would follow decades later.

At an opposite extreme in many respects is *Nunataks* by **John Luther Adams**, a composer explicitly inspired by nature and environmental concerns—though rarely dogmatic in his poetic manner of expression. The title is derived from the Inuit word for “solitary peaks,” specifically the jagged mountains that rise from

ice fields and glaciers, which the composer evokes in knots and whorls of notes set within portentous stillness. “As the ice melts and the sea rises,” Adams wrote of the work, “these solitary peaks stand as stark reminders of human isolation and vulnerability.”

In the wake of Adams’s elemental force, the *Étude No. 2* by **Philip Glass** provides respite and grounding reassurance. The term *étude*, defined as a piece intended to either reinforce or exploit some specific aspect of technique, is by its very nature objective and didactic; no particular program is implied, unless specified by a composer or tagged on by posterity.

But in the case of Glass’s two books of *Études* – the first six composed for his own 50th birthday, the full set of 20 completed for his 75th – comes a sensation of time passing. The pieces almost seem to count out some measure of our temporary existence on this fragile planet. Even if that weren’t Glass’s intent, profundity by implication is no less profound, the results no less moving.

Apart from the aforementioned second works by Cage and Monk included in this select version of Enger’s *Resonating Earth* project, the rest of the program comprises recent works by younger composers still very much in the process of realizing their life’s work. With *in the brittle quietude*, **Iman Habibi** refers to a crisis that remains all too present: the COVID-19 pandemic that forced lockdowns and imposed isolation around the world, and continues even now to make its presence felt in ways more limited, but no less real.

“*in the brittle quietude* explores the vacuum that was created following the pandemic, and the fragility of our ecosystem as musicians,” Habibi wrote about the piece, which is dedicated to an uncle who died during the pandemic. “It ends with the hope that a better, more equitable, more conscientious future

may await us on the other side.”

With *Gustave Le Grey*, by **Caroline Shaw**, comes a reference to music’s own powers of succor, refuge, and assurance. The piece has its roots in a student exercise, assigning Shaw to create a piece in response to an existing composition; Shaw selected Chopin’s Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17, No. 4. Chopin had arrived in Paris in 1831, part of the Great Emigration that saw thousands of Poles leave their homes. The Op. 17 mazurkas, composed over the next two years and based on a Polish folk-dance form, are presumed to signal his homesickness for a country to which he would never return.

Like Chopin, Shaw starts with a simple, repetitive figuration, then builds it into a more elaborate narrative. Her structure is less ornate and elaborate than what Chopin created in his mazurka – which can either be played in its entirety within Shaw’s piece or omitted as desired – but the similarity of spirit, the wistfulness for things passed, connects one artist readily to the other.

Two works by **Sean Hickey**, an eclectic, industrious composer born in Detroit, complete this realization of *Resonating Earth*. The first, *The Birds of Barclay Street*, ventures something practically impossible: crystallizing the pain, bereavement, and anguish prompted by the unthinkable acts of Sept. 11, 2001, into a three-minute contemplation capable of recognizing and assuaging pain and loss of any origin.

The other Hickey composition, *Reckoning*, performs a similar service in response to a far more intensely personal instance of loss: the death of a friend who, having recovered from what could have been a fatal health crisis, was killed instead by a bombing in Morocco. Using only a bare handful of notes, patterns that repeat and intensify, the piece is at once a threnody and a eulogy. Here,

again, what Hickey writes in response to a specific circumstance is left open to universal application.

What you hold in your hands now is only the tip of the iceberg, as Enger appropriately puts it. Her collection of songs for the Earth, as it were, will continue to grow, enlarged and enhanced by more composers and more pieces—not because they make some specific dogmatic point, but rather because their disparate paths toward similar ends serve as a powerful reminder of how everything – art, people, the environment, the planet – is connected.

Steve Smith

CAROLYN ENGER, PIANO

Pianist Carolyn Enger has gained critical acclaim for her lyrical and dynamic playing, as well as her deeply felt interpretations. In addition to an active performance schedule on two continents, Ms. Enger has enjoyed remarkable success as a recording artist: The New York Times selected her Naxos recording of intimate Ned Rorem miniatures, Piano Album I & Six Friends, as one of the newspaper's "Best In Classical Recordings", writing "Among the 90th-birthday tributes this year to the essential American composer Ned Rorem, this recording especially stands out," while Gramophone declared, "Enger raises the miniatures to a higher level."

Ms. Enger's touring opportunities have included venues throughout the United States and beyond, including the Kean University, Baruch College, Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, the Consul General of the Federal Republic

of Germany, United States Military Academy West Point, the Sheen Center for Thought & Culture, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, The National Gallery of Art in D.C., and the National Gallery in Oslo. Deepening her commitment to multimedia collaborations, Ms. Enger was part of renowned illustrator and writer Maira Kalman's exhibit *Maira Kalman Selects* at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York, and her recording of Arvo Pärt's music was featured in conceptual artist Mischa Kuball's sound and light exhibit *res.o.nant* at the Jewish Museum Berlin.

Recent highlights include the publication of her article, *The Mischlinge Exposé: Stories of Assimilation and Conversion*, in the book *Women Defying Hitler: Rescue and Resistance under the Nazis*, published by Bloomsbury Academic; concerts at Baruch College, Kean University, Noontime Concerts in San Francisco, Boston Public Library, the National Gallery in Oslo, the White Stork Synagogue in Wrocław, Poland; the Bach-Festival in Arnstadt, Germany; the Portuguese Synagogue's Candlelight Concert series in Amsterdam; concerts in Erfurt, Potsdam, and Gotha, Germany; and recitals in the greater New York area.

Ms. Enger is dedicated to bringing music to diverse audiences in accessible civic spaces. One of her performances at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center is featured in Frederick Wiseman's acclaimed documentary *Ex Libris*, which premiered on PBS. This past winter Carolyn enjoyed her residency, showcasing her immersive film/sound project *Resonating Earth*, with *Musica Sierra* and the public school children in the Sierra Valley. One presenter shared that her performance left audiences "in complete awe of her passion, skill and genuine warmth."

Ms. Enger studied at the Manhattan School of Music and is a Steinway Artist.

Recorded at Myers Recording Studio, Manhattan School of Music July 31,
2019, January 21 & 24, 2022; February 15, 2022; March 11, 2022
Engineered by Daniel Rorke

Mastered at Overtone Audio, Cambridge, MA
Artwork design by James Cardell-Oliver, Divine Art
Cover photos by J Henry Fair

Quarry Waltz & Ellis Island, Meredith Monk published by Boosey & Hawkes
l.v., Marcos Balter published by Marcos Balter
LILT, Nico Muhly published by St. Rose Music Publishing Co. & Chester Music
Auf einem anderen Blatt, Wolfgang Rihm published by Universal Edition
Orizzonte, Missy Mazzoli published by G. Shirmer
In a Landscape & Dream, John Cage published by Henmar Press
Nunataks, John Luther Adams published by Taiga Press
Etude No. 2, Philip Glass published by Dunvangel Music Publishing
in the brittle quietude, Iman Habibi published by Iman Habibi
Gustave Le Gray, Caroline Shaw published by Caroline Shaw Editions
The Birds of Barclay Street & Reckoning, Sean Hickey published by Cantabile
Publishing

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