



James  
**AIKMAN**

## Venice of the North Concerti

**Violin Concerto • Saxophone Concerto • Ania's Song**

**Charles Wetherbee, Violin • Taimur Sullivan, Alto Saxophone  
St Petersburg State Symphony Orchestra • Vladimir Lande**



## James Aikman (b. 1959): Violin Concerto: Lines in Motion

### Ania's Song: A Pavane for String Orchestra • Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra



Photo: Ellie Falaris Ganelin

James Aikman's music has received prestigious honors for decades. Each piece evokes a particular musical image, with its own distinct, emotive effect. His music has variously been described as "richly sonorous," "fascinating," "plaintively beautiful," "exciting, inventive and fresh." He was born in Indianapolis, a city most popularly affiliated with auto racing (Indy

500), pharmaceuticals (Lilly) and The International Violin Competition of Indianapolis. Yet Indy is also known for jazz greats including Wes Montgomery, Slide Hampton, J.J. Johnson, David Baker, Freddie Hubbard, and Steve Allee. Aikman credits early lessons with Allee in opening his musical thought. Aikman's principal teachers include Michael Schelle at Butler University, Frederick Fox and Donald Erb at Indiana University, William Bolcom at the Aspen Music Festival, and Louis Andriessen through the Netherlands Royal Conservatory. Significant fellowships include those from The Indiana Arts Commission (Master Artist), Kate and Cole Porter, the US Fulbright Program, Aspen, and The Michigan Society of Fellows. He serves on faculty at The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

The present recording contains three works for large ensemble written in recent years. Aikman's music, as it has developed over the past three decades, has knitted together a variety of styles and languages, and represents an amalgam of his broad experiences as a musician. The music on the current recording moves with comfort and surety from pop to jazz, from Schubert to Prokofiev, Barber and more modernist impulses. He is as at home within the confines of the major scale as he is ranging through the total chromatic, and he is as able to find great richness in a simple string texture as he does when weaving a colorful tapestry from the full orchestra on

which to display his soloists. Aikman's gift is to make even the most familiar gesture seem fresh and green, while fully acknowledging its heritage in earlier music. Part of what makes this so is the unaffected directness of his emotional expression. This is not music that is touting its knowingness, or that is hiding behind a show of erudition. While its craft is impeccable, its aims are not to impress, but to share and rejoice in a full heart.

The *Violin Concerto: Lines in Motion* predates the saxophone work by only a year, and while it too revisits earlier music, it offers striking contrast in the ways its three movements unfold. Here, the main body of the work is the central movement, *Quasi una Fantasia*, while the first and last movements serve as a frame. The opening *Prologue/Improvisation* begins with what seems like a simple series of chords in the orchestra, out of which eventually floats the soloist in long supple lines. But those chords are a kind of key to this work: the listener will notice that they are constantly changing color and density. In fact, they are the product of an intricate counterpoint of motives running through the orchestra, and we are being taught at the outset that this will be a work that will yield its greatest beauties to the listener who can hear how the individual voice contributes to the song of the whole.

*Ania's Song* was originally written for string quartet to celebrate the birthday of Ania Dowgiallo, wife of Thomas J. Beczkiewicz, co-founder of the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis. Here it is recast for string orchestra. As the composer notes, "*Ania's Song*, built around the initials of her name (A, D, B), resonates in a larger fashion as well. Ania is of Polish royalty, complete with castles and the like, yet lost so much in WWII. She eventually became a US citizen and married Tom. Recently, she and her family have been able to return and visit. *Ania's Song* is a tribute to the nobility that lives within sublime acceptance of life's travails. It also addresses reflection, joy, peace, memory." The music is elegantly simple and subtle, achieving its effects through the exquisite placement of a single note or shift of texture.

The *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra* has its roots in two earlier works, *Call and Response* for alto saxophone and piano, and the *Trio* for clarinet, cello and piano. The first movement opens with a repeated and extended rising figure in the saxophone that will provide much of the material of the music to come. This figure, made from a series of overlapped triads of various kinds, echoes the rising line formed from the tone-row of Alban Berg's *Violin Concerto*, and the music that follows shares with Berg's work a number of allusions to tonality, along with an affinity for pellucid orchestral color. The orchestration includes piano, so that what had been the saxophone's sole interlocutor is now surrounded with the massed and varied colors of the orchestra. The remaining two movements reinvestigate the music of the first two movements of the aforementioned *Trio*, but both reverse their order, and rework their content. It is particularly interesting to hear what had been the introductory movement of the *Trio* form the culmination of the *Concerto*, and to hear how the same music serves in these two radically different capacities.

All three works herein combine an immediacy of their moment with a transparent view into the past. In the case of the two concertos, this includes a view into the composer's own past. Both works revisit earlier chamber compositions with fascinating results. These works are thoroughly comprehensible as self-standing compositions, but are enriched by a comparison with the earlier chamber music. The changes are striking, ranging from direct orchestration to elaborate recomposition. Transforming the interactions of a trio of chamber musicians into the figure-and-ground perspective of a concerted work creates an entirely new understanding of the music.

#### Andrew Mead

I've written this music as a contribution to the musical repertoire I've studied and enjoyed nearly my entire life. Saxophonists do not yet have centuries of concert music written for them, though some of the greatest performing artists of our day play the saxophone. I've written this *Saxophone Concerto* because these dedicated virtuosi

deserve abundant musical creations worthy of their talent. I love hearing saxophone with orchestra. Violinists have a wealth of musical literature, yet since I've had a lifetime of association with great violinists, I believe I have written something viable and worthy of that tradition. I poured myself into these concerti for the vast sonic possibilities and musicianship of the orchestra as well as those of the soloist. I've written these concerti to be enchanting interactive works for both soloist and orchestra. *Ania's Song* serves as a peaceful Isle between the more dynamic works.

Throughout my career, I've been able to work with great musicians. It's essential for the seamless energy of the music to work with players whose backgrounds are wide and who approach the music with the same degree of purpose that I do. Taimur Sullivan, Charles Wetherbee, and Maestro Lande are classical music artists of the highest level, who have also listened to and played jazz and various forms of pop music. That is precisely how we are *genuinely* able to project the variety of stylistic nuances I call for in the music on this recording, as vastly different as: "a la rock guitar solo," "breathy, like Paul Desmond," "non vibrato, as in Renaissance vocal music," "give and take as in dancing," "with calm assuredness." Nothing is anachronistic. *All* is vocabulary.

After hearing a recording in New York City of my sonatas for violin and piano, Maestro Lande asked me to write the *Violin Concerto* that he, Chas, and the St Petersburg State Symphony Orchestra would soon premiere in the city of Stravinsky's childhood, of Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and other great composers. The *Violin Concerto's* success brought Taimur's saxophone concerto and *Ania's Song* the following year. While there for rehearsals, the performance, and recordings, we walked the same streets those composers walked. That remains particularly meaningful to me. So does the inspired spirit that sprung from the orchestra upon hearing the music and interacting with each of the exceptional soloists! We are proud of this cross-continental achievement that shows music *is* a universal language.

James Aikman

## Taimur Sullivan



Recognized as one of the leading American classical saxophonists of his generation, Taimur Sullivan enjoys a prolific career as a soloist, chamber musician, and member of the acclaimed PRISM Quartet. His performances have taken him from the stages of Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and the Knitting Factory, to engagements with the Cleveland Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, and Dallas Symphony, to concerts in Russia, Europe, and throughout Latin America. He has given premières of over one hundred new compositions, and can be heard on twenty-six recordings for the New World, Mode, Albany, Innova, Naxos, and Capstone record labels. Taimur Sullivan is the Artist/Professor of Saxophone at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. He performs exclusively on Selmer Paris saxophones.

## Charles Wetherbee



Violinist Charles Wetherbee has performed as a soloist and chamber musician throughout the world, including Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Canada, Mexico, and the United States. A native of Buffalo, New York, Charles gave his first performances at age six. He made his début with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra under Symon Bychkov, and since then has performed in Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Russia, Europe, the Far East, Canada, Mexico, and the United States. In 1990, he traveled to the Persian Gulf to perform for the men and women of the armed services. A devoted chamber musician, he is a founding member and first violin of the Carpe Diem String Quartet. Charles Wetherbee is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied with Aaron Rosand. As a recording artist, he is represented on Naxos, Vienna Modern Classics, Weasel Records, Seize the Music and Cascade labels. In 2002, he was fortunate enough to acquire a violin made by master luthier Kurt Widenhouse.

## St Petersburg State Symphony Orchestra



The St Petersburg State Symphony Orchestra was established in 1967 and until 1985 was known as the Orchestra of Ancient and Modern Music. Renowned soloists and conductors, including Yuri Temirkanov, Mariss Jansons, Svyatoslav Richter, and many others, have performed with the orchestra. In 1988, the orchestra began holding concerts in the Mirror Hall of the famous Princes Beloselsky-Belozersky Palace in the very heart of St Petersburg. Since 1990, the orchestra has been successfully touring in China, Japan, Germany, Austria, Mexico, Spain, Finland, Norway, Sweden, France, and Belgium. The orchestra's repertoire is limitless, as they have a well-considered policy of performing music of every epoch, genre, and style, with particular attention to the music of living composers. In 2008, the American Vladimir Lande became the orchestra's principal guest conductor.

## Vladimir Lande



Vladimir Lande is Principal Guest Conductor of the St Petersburg State Symphony Orchestra (Russia). He is guest conductor of the National Gallery Orchestra, Washington D.C., Music Director of the Washington Soloists Chamber Orchestra, the COSMIC Symphony Orchestra, and Johns Hopkins University Chamber Orchestra. He appears as conductor with ballet and opera companies in Europe and the United States. In summer 2004, he conducted the opening concert of St Petersburg's White Nights Festival. Since then, he has led notable orchestras in the United States, conducted the National Gallery Chamber Orchestra on an American tour, and served as Conductor of the 64th American Music Festival. Recordings include those on the Marquis, Arabesque, Kleos, and Naxos labels. In addition to his busy conducting schedule, Vladimir Lande maintains a successful solo and chamber music career as oboist of the renowned Poulenc Trio.

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James  
**AIKMAN**  
(b. 1959)

## Venice of the North Concerti

### Violin Concerto:

#### Lines in Motion (2009)\*

23:02

① I. Prologue/Improvisation...

5:07

② II. Quasi una Fantasia...

12:59

③ III. Toccata

4:56

#### ④ Ania's Song: A Pavane for String Orchestra (2006)

9:11

Commissioned by Thomas J Beczkiewicz

### Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra (2010)†

23:03

⑤ I. Call and Response

10:54

⑥ II. Refrains

7:53

⑦ III. Waltz Rounds

4:16

Charles Wetherbee, Violin\*

Taimur Sullivan, Alto Saxophone†

St Petersburg State  
Symphony Orchestra  
Vladimir Lande

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Award-winning composer James Aikman's music is 'accessible and inventive' (*Fanfare* magazine), and these three works embrace a colorful tapestry of stylistic influences, including jazz and pop. The elegantly simple and subtle *Ania's Song* is described by the composer as a 'peaceful isle' between the supple lines and intricate counterpoint of the *Violin Concerto* and the *Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra* with its translucent orchestration and echoes of Alban Berg. Leading American soloists join one of Russia's finest orchestras for a recording with truly international appeal.

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