

NEW FOCUS RECORDINGS

Douglas Boyce's *The Bird is an Alphabet* is a collection of his recent chamber works with voice, featuring performances by poet **Marlanda Dekine, counter)induction, Byrne:Kozar:Duo**, tenor **Robert Baker**, and pianist **Molly Orlando**. Setting texts by Dekine, Melissa Range, Wallace Stevens, Jorie Graham, and BJ Ward, Boyce approaches songs as a dramatic project, searching for the marriage between material and meaning that will animate the words.

Track List

A Book of Songs

1. i. A Feather For Voltaire	8:06
2. ii. The Apple Orchard in October	6:27
3. iii. Cy Est Pourtraicte, Madame Ste Ursule, Et Les Unze Mille Vierges	6:39
Robert Baker, tenor; Molly Orlando, piano	

Scriptorium

4. i. Tyrian Purple	5:03
5. ii. Orpiment	5:38
6. iii. Lampblack	2:52
7. iv. Verdigris	5:19
Byrne:Kozar:Duo	

Ars Poetica

8. i. Wilderness	5:08
9. ii. Intermezzo 1	2:28
10. iii. Returning	3:05
11. iv. Intermezzo 2	1:48
12. v. Out There	2:02
13. vi. Intermezzo 3	1:02
14. vii. Reclamation	1:58
15. viii. Intermezzo 4	1:40
16. ix. Risk	1:35

Marlanda Dekine, speaker
counter)induction: Nurit Pacht, violin; Daniel Lippel, guitar;
Caleb van der Swaagh, cello

Total Time: 60:50

Program Notes

Douglas Boyce is a musical philosopher whose work draws on early music, literature, and aesthetic thought. These are not mere affinities for Boyce, they comprise different components of his core conviction that music can be a forum for enlightened discourse. Working with text gives him the opportunity to merge semantic and abstract expressive meaning; an expansion of possibilities. From the most conventional setting in the program, *A Book of Songs*, through the exploration of an unconventional instrumentation for the Byrne:Kozar:Duo, and finally with *Ars Poetica* for spoken word poet

Douglas Boyce: The Bird is an Alphabet

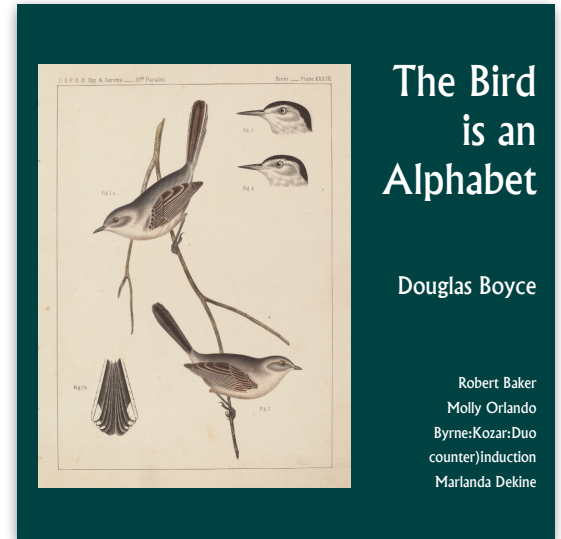
new works from composer
Douglas Boyce, featuring poet
Marlanda Dekine, counter)induction,
Byrne:Kozar:Duo, tenor **Robert Baker**,
and pianist **Molly Orlando**

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Douglas Boyce: [Website](#), [Facebook](#)



1-3. A Book of Songs (2019)		
i. A Feather For Voltaire		8:06
ii. The Apple Orchard in October		6:30
iii. Cy Est Pourtraicte, Madame Ste Ursule, Et Les Unze Mille Vierges		6:35
4-7. Scriptorium (2021)		
i. Tyrian Purple		5:03
ii. Orpiment		5:37
iii. Lampblack		2:51
iv. Verdigris		5:18
8-16. Ars Poetica (2021)		
i. Wilderness		5:07
ii. Intermezzo 1		2:28
iii. Returning		3:05
iv. Intermezzo 2		1:47
v. Out There		2:01
vi. Intermezzo 3		1:02
vii. Reclamation		1:58
viii. Intermezzo 4		1:40
ix. Risk		1:31

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and ensemble, Boyce explores how text can shape the sound of the music and music can frame the meaning of the text.

The album opens with ***A Book of Songs***, a three movement cycle that sets poems by Jorie Graham, BJ Ward, and Wallace Stevens, respectively. “A Feather For Voltaire” word paints a bird in flight, with flitting and fluttering arpeggiations in the piano accompaniment and swooping, melismatic figures in the tenor part. A contrasting section renders the bird land-bound, with halting music in the lower register of the keyboard. “The Apple Orchard in October” ruminates on mortality with carefully considered cells of musical material that congeal momentarily into a continuous texture. “Cy Est Pourtraicte, Madame Ste Ursule, Et Les Unze Mille Vierges” is a fantasy that toggles between mystical and earthy impulses. Incandescent voicings, tolling harmonics, and scurrying passagework in the piano support the tenor’s narrative style as it alternates between quasi-recitative and dramatic intervallic jumps.

Scriptorium was written in 2021 for the trumpet and soprano ensemble, the Byrne:Kozar:Duo, and sets texts by Melissa Range. Boyce uses medieval counterpoint as a reference point for how to write for two single-line voices. Imitation and motivic transposition extend musical ideas, and occasionally Kozar’s trumpet takes a brief, soloistic flight. Within the context of *Scriptorium*’s overall austerity, mutes on Kozar’s horn define contrasting sound profiles. The final movement, “Verdigris,” contains the piece’s most theatrical music, as Kozar assumes a more accompanimental role with a repeated *lontano* figure underneath an alternation in Byrne’s line between *parlando* delivery and wide intervallic leaps. It closes with a crystalline contrapuntal passage, reasserting the rigorous frame which defines the work.

Ars Poetica is a collaboration between Boyce and Gullah Geechee poet Marlanda Dekine, who is heard performing the spoken word part. Dekine’s texts are evocative of their experience grappling with identity, family, and the meaning of heritage in an ever changing society. The poem is in five parts, with four instrumental intermezzi interspersed between. Boyce deftly uses the trio in a varied relationship to Dekine’s measured style of text delivery, sometimes establishing a stable musical texture as accompaniment and other times allowing the music to dynamically evolve with the words, always positioning the music in line with Dekine’s easy, storytelling style. The result is a more dramatic presentation than the other two song settings on the album.

“Wilderness” traverses varied musical territory, through an upright introductory prelude, restless transitional

passages, and loping grooves. “Returning” holds a tense character of anticipation throughout, momentarily breaking with Dekine’s folksy reminiscence, “And I love big as all that water... I speak to you plain.” The contrast is emblematic of Boyce’s framing of Dekine’s narrative poetry — the music alternates between capturing the intimate vernacular quality of the words before zooming out to contextualize the struggle of preserving heritage within a fractured contemporary civic fabric. “Out There” overflows with anger at the vacuity and inhumanity of modern American culture, as a furious quintuplet figure in the bowed strings is repeatedly destabilized by a polyrhythmic accented triplet in the guitar. “Reclamation” layers quirky accents and figurations over a rocking ostinato pattern in the cello.

The four intermezzi show Boyce’s playful side, turning motives around and mining them for developmental potential. Intermezzo 1 features Robert Fripp-esque unison passagework that eventually splinters into a game of cat and mouse between the instruments. Intermezzo 2 is listed in the score as a *caccia*, or a hunt song, channeling Bartók with sharp accents, jaunty leaps, and vigorous ensemble imitation. Intermezzo 3 is an ethereal duo between violin and cello, a simple meditation on a set of interval relationships, while Intermezzo 4 reprises some of the material introduced in the opening movement. *Ars Poetica* ends with nostalgic Americana, as we hear muted, Copland-esque chords creating a luminescent halo around Dekine’s words of reverent acceptance, “I pray, thank you, every time I remember.”

Bio

Douglas Boyce writes chamber music that draws on Medieval and Renaissance traditions and modernist aesthetics, building rich rhythmic structures that shift between order, fragmentation, elegance, and ferocity. His approach is deeply historical and broadly philosophical. This approach and the works themselves connect to many aspects of the scholarship in the humanities, including history, anthropology, literary studies, and philosophy. He is Professor of Music at George Washington University and holds a BA in music and Physics from Williams College (1992), an MM in composition from the University of Oregon (1996), and a PhD in Composition from the University of Pennsylvania (2000). He has been awarded the League of Composers ISCM Composers Award (2005), the Salvatore Martirano Prize (2006), and the Robert Avalon Prize (2010), and a Fromm Commission (2012). He is a composer-in-residence of counter)induction, a composer/performer collective active in the New York region. His works have been published by New Dynamic Records, Capstone Records, the Society of Composers, Inc., and New Focus Recordings.