



The Bird is an Alphabet

Douglas Boyce

Robert Baker
Molly Orlando
Byrne:Kozar:Duo
counter)induction
Marlanda Dekine

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1-3. A Book of Songs	Robert Baker, tenor Molly Orlando, piano
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	Byrne:Kozar:Duo
i. Tyrian Purple	5:03
ii. Orpiment	5:37
iii. Lampblack	2:51
iv. Verdigris	5:18

8-16. Ars Poetica	Marlanda Dekine counter)induction
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

The bird is an alphabet: a phrasing taken from Jorie Graham's poem, 'A Feather for Voltaire', exploring poetic mediation of the observed world through the traces it leaves on the page, traces we thereafter call words. In Graham's poem 'A Feather for Voltaire',

... each flight is an arc to buttress the sky,
a loan to the sky
And the little words we make of them,
the single feathers, dropped
for us to recover,
fall and fall,
a nimble armor ...

Songfulness must be understood not as a feature, but as a project, one that expands the technics of musicking as much as its aesthetics. Graham's 'nimble armor' is required of a composer attempting to 'set' text, any text; once the first attempt is made, this becomes the norm, and meaning and meaningfulness, again and again, shift and fluctuate. In my 'A Feather for Voltaire, the voice is surrounded by the piano's falling feathers and velocities at the edge of perceptibility, and grapples with language's efforts to capture being; The bird's flight becomes an emblem of both ordered grace and the insufficiency of the mind to capture such grace. "Setting" is, on one level, the precisely wrong word to describe the project of composing a work with linked textuality and musicality; "to set" is to settle, to find balance and stability. Bringing music and text more tightly together stabilizes little while vastly expanding possibilities, as the technics of melody, harmony, rhythm, and texture (and the emergent phenomena of form) each bring new (and open) meaningfulness, and so compound signification into a wider field of what might be. In the third work here, *Ars Poetica*, we see this pluralism manifest along multiple axes in the play of text and music; speech displaces song as the poet's exploration of their thrownness is framed by chamber music, with its intricate counterpoint, delicate colors, and sudden turns to ferocious virtuosity. This leads to both summative complexity, but also situates new connections and resonances, opening new domains, encompassing but also surpassing those domains.

We must remember, though, that performance (enacted or observed)

positions us like Klee's *Angelus Novus*, experiencing a violent departure from a war-torn heaven. The Angel of History moves forward, but faces backward, reconstructing a world from the staff of the past; the fragments of tradition pass us as they move toward an unknown future. Across this album, plainchant's rhythm, art-song's expressivity, *ars nova's* geometry, and opera's virtuosity; all fly by as we move (drifting or spreading) toward the future. While this fragmentation may seem quite Modern, the mechanics of its poesis are hardly new. There are echoes of the highly abstracted connections of its poems and the intricate polyphonic of the Burgundian *Ars Nova* in *Scriptorium*, adopted into the aesthetics of the Modern. Galileo and Zarlino imagined themselves reestablishing a historical balance between melos and text, but such efforts to more closely bind affect and text have always ended up amplifying and radicalizing the potential of the interaction of text and music. By 1882 Hugo Riemann described 'the sung word replac[ing] the spoken word, while the musical elements of rhythm and cadence inherent in speech are heightened to ... rhythmically ordered melody', but didn't see the ontological entailment, described by Steiner ("*After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*" 1975), as the emergence of "a new whole which neither devalues nor eclipses its linguistic source". This is a shift from resonance and congruence of poem and music to a ludic collision between the word and the line, between the signifier and the media in which it is expressed, a process in which both are transformed, and in their transformations generate something to be found in neither alone.

For, indeed, the bird is an alphabet, jumbled and re-sorted with startling speed and agility, whose new path feels as inevitable as its prior, gaining energy as meaning is displaced by experience. Throughout, this collection strives to push back against the normative relationship of text, setting, and 'meaning' (the standard fidelity of declamation), suggesting an openness in the relationships of melos and poesis, generative in technics and signification, adding to the great bestiary of 'song'.

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A Book of Songs (2019) is a collection of settings of works by American poets Jorie Graham, BJ Ward, and Wallace Stevens; the pieces continue the expansive, formally intricate art-song tradition inaugurated in Europe

in the 19th century, but are also deeply embedded in the aesthetics and technics of the modern. "A Feather for Voltaire" deploys birds and flight as extended metaphors for the energy and chance-filled process, as designed aleatory generates dizzying rhythm and harmonic clashes; the poem and its song shift, language falls apart, returning to the quill of the poet at work. Mortality and loss pervade B.J. Ward's "The Apple Orchard in October;" meditative and somber, the music develops from a few cells to a more expansive being, only to be reduced again. In "Cy Est Pourtraicte, Madame Ste Ursule, Et Les Unze Mille Vierges" we find shuffling of the real and the mystic, of the divine and the profane, as devotion creeps towards eros.

Scriptorium (2021) (tracks 4-7) pushes more deeply into the 21st century, through novel instrumentation and a modernist counterpoint evocative of the medieval *Ars Veterum* practices. Written for Byrne:Kozar:Duo, the work sets four poems by Melissa Range. The poems (selected from the book of the same name) explore mortality, divinity, and faith using the written page and the ink required by sacred texts as a core metaphor for explorations of divinity. The described mechanics of medieval ink production are beautiful and disturbing in the same gesture, with vibrant colors, destruction at a vast scale, and perduring doubt inter-threaded. Throughout the collection, isorhythm and polyphony counterpoint evoke the subtle play between poetic theme and musical form found in the *Ars Nova*, while amplifying the dark philosophy of Range's poetry.

Ars Poetica (2021) (tracks 8-15) is a collaborative work, developed with poet Marlanda Dekine, resulting in a hybrid collection of text and music drawing from the poet's cultural and biological roots as a Gullah-Geechee person, juxtaposed with the shifting textures, dense harmonies, and rhythmic energy of the North Atlantic Modernist concert tradition. Here we see a paratactic resolution to the tension of text and music; the congruences here in affect and in structure are both enriched by the delicacy of their interplay. Written for violin, guitar, cello, and spoken word, the piece surfaces insights into the powers of being itself: into the gift of heritage, and spiritual technologies which defy any terrifying 'thrown-ness' of subjugation, technologies that speak to us through myth and history and the world-transforming action of art. *Ars Poetica* consists of a long poem in five parts, with four substantial, sometimes virtuosic intermezzi between each. Speech, music, and poetry from different traditions are braided

together, an endeavor to resuscitate dormant artistic traditions predating modern musical or literary categories, reconstituting a multi-dimensional “ars poetica” for the Now.

For complete texts of all poems, visit www.newfocusrecordings.com/catalogue/douglas-boyce-the-bird-is-an-alphabet

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Robert Baker has been a pillar of the Washington D.C. classical music scene for over 30 years. He has performed in over 250 productions with the Washington National Opera, including high-profile premieres of works by Phillip Glass and Jake Heggie. Other career highlights include his Metropolitan Opera debut and a Grammy-winning recording with the National Symphony Orchestra. As an esteemed interpreter of Britten, Baker has sung the Serenade across the country. He has collaborated on over 20 premieres of new works and frequently performs contemporary music. Baker has been on the faculty of The George Washington University since 1992. His acclaimed career also includes singing with the US Air Force Singing Sergeants, and major symphonies across the country. After 30+ years on stage, Baker continues to captivate audiences with his versatile artistry.

Pianist Molly Orlando is a versatile soloist, collaborator, teacher, and adjudicator praised for her expressive and edgy performances of both traditional and contemporary repertoire. An advocate of new music, Orlando has premiered numerous works by contemporary composers and frequently collaborates with ensembles like UrbanArias and Third Millennium Ensemble. She often performs with renowned classical saxophonists and has given concerts internationally. Recent highlights include an album of story-inspired works and a performance of Andy Akiho’s music with the US Air Force Band. Based in the Washington D.C. area, Orlando is on faculty at George Washington University and co-owns a music studio. Her artistry and advocacy have made her a sought-after soloist and collaborator on the contemporary classical music scene.

Jorie Graham was born in 1950 in New York City to a journalist father and sculptor mother. Raised in Rome and educated in French schools, she studied philosophy at the Sorbonne before attending NYU as an undergraduate. She received an MFA in poetry from the University of Iowa. Graham is the acclaimed author of numerous poetry collections, including

Sea Change (2008), *Never* (2002), *Swarm* (2000), and *The Dream of the Unified Field*, which won the 1996 Pulitzer Prize. Of her expansive, philosophical poetry, James Longenbach wrote in the New York Times: “For 30 years, Jorie Graham has engaged the whole human contraption rather than just the emotional slice often reserved for poems. Like Rilke or Yeats, she imagines the hermetic poet as a public figure addressing urgent issues simply by writing.” Graham has also edited the anthologies *Earth Took of Earth: 100 Great Poems* and *The Best American Poetry 1990*. Honors include a MacArthur Fellowship and the Morton Dauwen Zabel Award. She taught at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and is currently Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard. She served as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 1997-2003.

BJ Ward is an acclaimed poet and author of several collections including *Jackleg Opera: Collected Poems, 1990-2013*, which received the Paterson Poetry Prize. His poetry has been featured on NPR’s *The Writer’s Almanac*, NJTV’s *State of the Arts*, and in publications like *Poetry*, *The American Poetry Review*, *The New York Times*, and more. His essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Inside Jersey*, *The Worcester Review*, and other outlets. One of his poems was cast in bronze for the Grounds for Sculpture museum in New Jersey. Ward has received a Pushcart Prize, two Distinguished Artist Fellowships from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and recognition from *The Star-Ledger* as one of “10 Dynamic Jersey Artists Not Named Springsteen.” As a teacher, Ward has received the Governor’s Award in Arts Education from New Jersey, been named a Distinguished Teaching Artist by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and honored as Teaching Artist of the Year by Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey. He has taught creative writing extensively, including at Warren County Community College where he received the NISOD Excellence Award. Recent appearances include the University of Delaware, Rutgers Writers’ Conference, Monmouth University’s Bruce Springsteen Symposium, the Princeton Public Library, and the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival. In 2019, he taught at Lafayette College. Ward lives in New Jersey with his partner, writer Laurie Granieri, and their young son.

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The innovative Byrne:Kozar Duo brings together soprano Corrine Byrne and trumpeter Andy Kozar in unique pairings of Baroque works for natural trumpet and soprano with modern commissions. Praised for an “arresting

symbiosis” (Textura) between voice and trumpet, Byrne and Kozar combine strengths in early and contemporary repertoire. Individually acclaimed, together they have commissioned and premiered works by notable composers while also performing on renowned stages globally. Their album was named a top recording of 2017 by *The New Yorker*. With a commitment to historically informed and new music, the Byrne:Kozar Duo presents captivating programs that highlight the expressive capabilities of their instruments.

Melissa Range is the author of *Scriptorium*, a winner of the 2015 National Poetry Series (Beacon Press, 2016), and *Horse and Rider* (Texas Tech University Press, 2010). Her current poetic project is an archival engagement with nineteenth century abolitionist print culture. Recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Ecotone*, *The Iowa Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Nation*, and *Ploughshares*. Range is the recipient of awards and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rona Jaffe Foundation, the American Antiquarian Society, the Hermitage Artist Retreat, and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Originally from East Tennessee, she teaches creative writing and American literature at Lawrence University in Wisconsin.

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Marlanda Dekine is the author of *Thresh & Hold* (Hub City Press) and *i am from a punch & a kiss* (unnamed LLC). Her work has been anthologized in *What Things Cost: An Anthology for the People* and *Ecological Solidarities: Mobilizing Faith and Justice in an Entangled World*. She is a South Carolina Arts Commission Spoken Word/Slam Poetry fellow, Castle of our Skins Shirley Graham Dubois Creative in Residence, Tin House scholar, and Palm Beach Poetry Langston Hughes fellow. Her poems have been published by the Poetry Foundation, *Orion Magazine*, *Oxford American*, and elsewhere. She received a Governor’s Award from South Carolina Humanities and the New Southern Voices in Poetry Prize, selected by Gabrielle Calvocoressi.

The contemporary music collective counter)induction (c)i has become a leading figure in new classical music over the past twenty years. Acclaimed for their virtuosic performances and daring programs, c)i has brought contemporary chamber works to stages worldwide. Dedicated advocates for emerging and underrepresented composers, they have premiered numerous works and received awards for championing new music. Beyond public

concerts, c)i engages diverse audiences through educational workshops and interactive shows. After two decades, their passion remains unchanged: delivering compelling performances that embody their commitment to today’s classical music. c)i’s artistry and unwavering dedication have cemented their influential role in the contemporary music landscape.

Guitarist Daniel Lippel, called an “exciting soloist” (*New York Times*) has a multi-faceted career as a soloist, chamber musician, collaborator, and recording artist. Recent recitals include Cleveland International Guitar Festival, Sinus Ton Festival (Germany), the National University of Colombia, and the Triangle and New York Classical Guitar Societies. As a contemporary chamber musician, he has been a member of the International Contemporary Ensemble since 2005 and counter)induction since 2019, and played as a guest with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, New York City Ballet, New York New Music Ensemble, Wet Ink Ensemble, Talea Ensemble, and Ensemble Dal Niente, performing at such venues as the Dutch National Opera, Ultima Festival (Norway), Macau Festival (China), Kunst Universitaet Graz (Austria), Mostly Mozart Festival, Ojai Festival, and Ottawa Chamber Festival (Canada).

Violinist Nurit Pacht has led an illustrious international career as a soloist and chamber musician. A prize winner at prestigious competitions, she has performed as a soloist across the globe, including high-profile events for the UN and European Commission. Pacht toured the U.S. and Europe in the theatrical work “Relative Light” featuring Cage’s “Freeman Etudes” and collaborated with choreographer Bill T. Jones on Bach works. She premiered and recorded Noam Sherif’s violin concerto “Dibrot” written for her. As a baroque specialist, Pacht earned her master’s at Juilliard. An advocate of contemporary music, she has premiered several new works. Her extensive discography includes the Toccata Classics release of Ernst Krenek’s Violin Concerto. With critical acclaim for her “intense musicality” (*The Strad*), Pacht continues to captivate audiences worldwide through her vibrant artistry.

Praised for his “entrancing” performances (*National Sawdust Log*), Caleb van der Swaagh is the cellist of the GRAMMY-nominated Aizuri Quartet and is a versatile chamber musician and soloist. An alumnus of Carnegie Hall’s Ensemble Connect, he is the recipient of the Manhattan School of Music Pablo Casals and the Tanglewood Karl Zeise Memorial Cello Prize. An advocate of contemporary music, he is a member of counter)induction

and Ensemble Échappé, as well as performing regularly with other leading contemporary music ensembles. He also performs his own compositions and arrangements. His extensive discography includes albums on New Focus Recordings, Albany Records, Bright Shiny Things, and Avie Records among others. Caleb is a graduate of the Columbia University – Juilliard Exchange program, New England Conservatory, and the Manhattan School of Music. His primary teachers are Bonnie Hampton, Laurence Lesser, and David Geber. Caleb is the cello professor at the Conservatory of Music at SUNY Purchase College.

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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 (www.counterinduction.com). His works have been published by New Dynamic Records, Capstone Records, the Society of Composers, Inc., and New Focus Recordings.

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Performance, Editing, and Production Credits

Tracks 1-3. *A Book of Songs* (2019)
Robert Baker, tenor
Molly Orlando, piano
recorded and edited by Dan Shores
Sono Luminus, 11 June 2017

Tracks 4-7. *Scriptorium* (2021)
Byrne:Kozar:Duo
Corinne Byrne, soprano
Andrew Kozar, trumpet
recorded and edited by Ryan Streber
Oktaven, 21 March 2021

Tracks 8-16. *Ars Poetica* (2021)
counter)induction
Marlanda Dekine, poet
Nurit Pacht, violin
Daniel Lippel, guitar
Caleb van der Swaagh, cello
recorded and edited by Ryan Streber
Oktaven Audio, 24 June 2022

Produced by Douglas Boyce, Ryan Streber and Daniel Lippel.

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