

THE WORLD-PREMIERE RECORDING OF LOEFFLER'S
REDISCOVERED OCTET



forgotten sounds

GRAEME STEELE JOHNSON

STELLA CHEN / MATTHEW COHEN / SAMUEL DECAPRIO / YUN HAN

BRIDGET KIBBEY / BORA KIM / SIWOO KIM / HAN LASH / MATTHEW LIPMAN

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FORGOTTEN SOUNDS

// Fancy a Paganini who has read Maeterlinck; fancy an imagination fantastic and slightly strained in the path of the morbid; fancy perfect musicianship, a delicate sense of color, values, and a sense of the grotesque; fancy all these things and you have not yet grasped the half of Loeffler's music."

—Philip Hale, *Musical Courier*,
February 23, 1898

It's not every day that you hear a world-premiere recording over 125 years after the piece was written. Each time I've listened, I've marveled that no one alive today has had the privilege of knowing Charles Martin Loeffler's Octet. I'm thrilled to reintroduce to the world this music that was left unpublished, unrecorded and unheard since 1897.

Ironically, it was during another period of silence that I stumbled upon Loeffler's long-dormant Octet.

When performance opportunities dried up in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, I turned my attention to writing program notes for music festivals that had yet to cancel their concerts. I started researching Loeffler's Two Rhapsodies for oboe, viola and piano, a work that mixes Brahmsian Romantic warmth with iridescent Impressionist harmony and French Symbolist poetry. The composer's biography chronicles a similar identity crisis: Loeffler was born in Berlin and inherited a storied German musical tradition through his violin teacher Joseph Joachim (a close collaborator of

Brahms and the Schumanns), but after an itinerant childhood he ultimately concealed his Germanness behind a heavy dose of Francophilia and falsely claimed Alsatian origin for most of his life. After settling in Boston, he appeared to Americans as French and was analyzed as such throughout his life and long after.

Loeffler's penchant for French Symbolist poetry puts him in the company of his Impressionist contemporaries Debussy and Ravel, who wrote music inspired by such writers of the movement as Verlaine, Baudelaire and Maeterlinck, as did Loeffler.

Given Loeffler's Impressionist streak, my mind went immediately to Ravel and Debussy when I came across a mention of his 1897 Octet for two clarinets, harp, string quartet and double bass; Loeffler's instrumentation resembles Ravel's unique blend of winds, strings and harp in his *Introduction and Allegro*.

The scarcity of repertoire for that colorful combination is part of what had inspired my 2018 octet arrangement of Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, also featured on this album for the first time. Seeking to reconnect the music with the intimacy of the poem that inspired it, I pared Debussy's orchestral score down to a chamber ensemble of flute, clarinet, harp, string quartet and double bass—Ravel's cast plus a bass, and, coincidentally, almost identical to the forces in Loeffler's Octet.

Hoping I had stumbled upon another convenient companion piece, I eagerly searched for a recording of Loeffler's Octet. Then, for sheet music. Then, for any record of the piece beyond the list of works that had alerted me to its existence. Gradually, I came to realize that not only had the piece never been recorded, but it had never been published or subsequently heard at all after two initial performances in 1897 by the Kneisel Quartet and members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

But the Octet's silence for more than a century should not be taken as an indicator of its quality any more than Loeffler's obscurity today should represent his historical and musical significance.

Hailed in obituaries as "the dean of American composers," Loeffler joined the Boston Symphony as assistant concertmaster in 1882—the orchestra's second season ever, and a time when Boston was "the musical Athens of America." He rose to such prominence that he became something of a cult figure in Boston society, and the BSO clocked no less than 117 performances of his music by the end of his life. For the first four decades of the twentieth century, Loeffler was one of the most performed American composers in his adopted country and in Europe. One reviewer present at the 1897 premiere of Loeffler's Octet "could hardly say enough" about the piece, writing, "the work took nearly everyone by storm."

Why, then, if not for lacking quality, have Loeffler and his music faded from popular consciousness?

Part of the answer lies in the same cosmopolitanism that made the transplanted composer so irresistible to Americans during his lifetime. In an era acutely inflected by nationalism, Loeffler's complicated heritage made him something of a cultural chameleon. Alternately advancing and hindering his career, Loeffler's flexible identity allowed him to assimilate at times, marked him as appealingly exotic at others, or condemned him to an awkward misfit position between the continents.

Despite his prominence on both sides of the Atlantic, for posterity Loeffler was ultimately too American for the European musical establishment and too European for the maverick sound of the New World—a predicament that effectively wrote him out of both musical histories. A cosmopolitan in one sense, Loeffler, in another, belonged not to all countries, but to none.

At least, that's how I consoled myself as I sat on this discovery for almost two years, anxiously wondering if this forgotten piece was any good. I ultimately tracked down the manuscript to Loeffler's Octet in the archives of the Library of Congress in the spring of 2020, but since the Library was shuttered due to the pandemic, it wasn't until January 2021 that I was able to get someone to scan the artifact for me.

When at last the 75-page manuscript arrived in my inbox, handwritten and heavily revised by the composer, I gained perspective on another reason

for Loeffler's disappearance from the canon. Like Brahms, Loeffler was intensely critical of his own work; he revised fastidiously in multiple rounds and withheld most of his music from publication. The Octet's score was mosaicked with copious annotations, deletions, scratchings and sketches. In several cases, Loeffler had composed an entire page of music and then drawn an arrow through it, indicating to skip over it all.

Reconstructing the score from this problematic manuscript was equal parts maddening and enthralling, like musical archeology. Each page offered an exciting opportunity for discovery and posed new interpretive challenges. It took me a year to sift through the manuscript and transcribe my own legible, edited edition using music notation software, crossing my fingers all the while that I wasn't wasting my time on a dud of a piece.

Finally, in January 2022, I assembled eight musicians to read through the piece in private—its first hearing in 125 years. It was such an interesting and completely foreign experience walking into a rehearsal with no idea how the piece goes. Usually, when working with old music, musicians have a longstanding, recorded performing tradition to refer to for matters of style and interpretation, or with new music can communicate directly with living composers. This case of "new old music" offered none of that direction, and in the absence of that interpretive blueprint we found so much new territory to discover.

Far from a dud, the first reading revealed a kaleidoscopic piece whose three movements span a half-hour and embrace a host of eclectic musical resonances. Straddling influences from Brahms to Debussy to early Schoenberg, with moods ranging from an elegiac, Wagnerian Adagio to a folksy *alla Zingara* finale, the collision of styles in Loeffler's Octet embodies the groping for national identity happening at the dawn of American music.

The most interesting potential of the Loeffler Octet revival, however, is not about dusting off a bygone era, but about what it means for music today; not the immaculate resurrection of a forgotten piece, but the reinvigoration of the present moment with unheard sounds and unknown histories—the refraction of the past through the present.

For this reason we have chosen to close the album with another little-known Loeffler work, the titular *Timbres oubliés* (Forgotten Sounds), originally for voice and piano but heard here on clarinet and harp for the first time. We offer the song, and the album as a whole, as a reminder that our modern sense of the canon is based only on that narrow sliver of music we know today—the music that survived. By restoring these *Forgotten Sounds* to our collective memory, we hope to paint a more complete picture of musical history and imagine a more colorful musical future.

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GRAEME STEELE JOHNSON **CLARINET**

Praised for his “elegant and rounded sound” (*Albany Times Union*) and “effortless... unmatched” technique (*The Clarinet Online*), Graeme Steele Johnson is an artist of uncommon imagination and versatility. His diverse artistic endeavors range from a TEDx talk comparing Mozart and *Seinfeld*, to his reconstruction of a forgotten 125-year-old work by Charles Martin Loeffler, to performances of Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto and Quintet in their original form on an elongated clarinet that he commissioned.

Johnson’s performances include appearances at the Library of Congress, The Morgan Library, Chamber Music Northwest, Ravinia, Emerald City Music and the Bridgehampton, Rockport, Orcas Island and Phoenix Chamber Music Festivals, as well as solo recitals at the Kennedy Center and Chicago’s Dame Myra Hess series. He is also a regular performer at the Annapolis Chamber Music Festival, Archipelago Collective Chamber Music Festival and Caroga Lake Music Festival. As a concerto soloist, he has performed with the Vienna International Orchestra, Springfield Symphony Orchestra, Caroga Arts Ensemble, Vermont Mozart Festival Orchestra and the CME Chamber Orchestra.

Since 2022 he has served as the clarinetist of the award-winning quintet WindSync, one of only two American wind quintets with a full-time, international touring schedule. Also sought after as a chamber musician outside of that group, Johnson has collaborated with such distinguished artists as Jon Kimura Parker, Ida and Ani Kavafian, Steven Tenenbom and Peter Wiley, as well as the Miró,

Callisto and KASA Quartets, Imani Winds and the New York New Music Ensemble.

Driven by his interest in shedding fresh perspective on familiar music, Johnson has authored numerous chamber arrangements of repertoire ranging from Mozart and Debussy to Gershwin and Messiaen, and performed them with such artists as the Miró Quartet, Valerie Coleman and Han Lash. His arrangements have also been championed by others around the world, with performances by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (Australia), Moscow Conservatory and La Jolla Music Society, and multiple commissions from The Happenstancers (Toronto).

Johnson is the winner of the Hellam Young Artists’ Competition and the Yamaha Young Performing Artists Competition. Other recent accolades include the St. Botolph Club Foundation’s Emerging Artist Award and the inaugural Lee Memorial Scholarship from the Center for Musical Excellence. He has recorded commercially for Hyperion, Azica, MSR Classics and Musica Solis Productions, and begins his relationship with Delos with this album.

Johnson completed undergraduate study at The University of Texas at Austin under the tutelage of Nathan Williams. He earned graduate degrees from the Yale School of Music, where he studied with David Shifrin and Ricardo Morales and was twice awarded the school’s Alumni Association Prize, followed by doctoral study with Charles Neidich and Kofi Agawu at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York.



STELLA CHEN VIOLIN

American violinist Stella Chen garnered worldwide attention with her first-prize win at the 2019 Queen Elizabeth International Violin Competition, followed by the 2020 Avery Fisher Career Grant and 2020 Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award. In 2023, she was named the Gramophone Young Artist of the Year for her all-Schubert debut recording on Platoon. Chen has appeared across North America, Europe and Asia in concerto and recital with ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra of Europe, and in venues that include the Vienna Musikverein, Carnegie Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam and Berlin Philharmonie. As a chamber musician, she appears with Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and at festivals such as Heidelberg, Moritzburg and Ravinia. A graduate of Harvard and Juilliard, Chen plays the 1720 "General Kyd" Stradivarius, on generous loan from Dr. Ryuji Ueno and Rare Violins In Consortium, Artists and Benefactors Collaborative. She serves on the faculty of The Juilliard School as a teaching assistant to her longtime mentor Li Lin.



MATTHEW COHEN VIOLA

Ukrainian-American violist Matthew Cohen is a dynamic and versatile artist whose captivating performances have made him one of the most sought-after violists of his generation. Recently appointed as the violist of the Formosa Quartet and a founding member of Ensemble Elatós, he was a special prize winner at the prestigious Primrose International Viola Competition as well as garnering top prizes at the Città di Cremona International Viola Competition, Vivo International Music Competition and The Art of Duo International Competition as a founding member of the Li-Cohen Duo with his wife, pianist Zhenni Li-Cohen. He has concertized as a soloist with orchestras such as the Gstaad Festival Orchestra, I Virtuosi Italiani, The Juilliard Orchestra, Symphony in C, North Shore Symphony Orchestra, Colburn Orchestra, Oregon Sinfonietta, and gave the world premiere of internationally recognized video game score composer Garry Schyman's viola concerto *Zingaro* with the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony.



SAMUEL DECAPRIO CELLO

Cellist Samuel DeCaprio is an active performer and freelancer based in New York City. His New York debut featured the North American premiere of Grażyna Bacewicz's Cello Concerto No. 2 with The Juilliard Orchestra and conductor David Robertson in Alice Tully Hall. Appearing across the globe as a soloist and chamber musician, he has been featured on prominent radio programs including WQXR New York, WFMT Chicago, NPR and WCNI, and has recorded for ECM Records, MSR Classics and Nonesuch Records. His festival appearances include Ravinia, IMS Prussia Cove, Les Rencontres Musicales de Noyers, Domaine Forget, Kneisel Hall, Lake George, Meadowmount and Orford Musique. He holds degrees from the University of Connecticut, Eastman, Mannes, Yale and Juilliard. In 2022, DeCaprio founded the Arazzo Music Festival, an annual chamber music festival focused on bringing free high-caliber concerts and educational events to his home state of Connecticut.



YUN HAN CELLO

Originally from Taiwan, Yun Han moved to the United States in 2012. She studied with Clive Greensmith at the Colburn Conservatory and earned a master's degree from the Yale School of Music under the tutelage of Paul Watkins, Ralph Kirshbaum and Ole Akahoshi. Now pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Michigan under the guidance of Amir Eldan, Han won the grand prize at the New York Music Competition in 2013, numerous first prizes in the Taiwan National Student Music Competition, as well as the Ensemble 212 Young Artist Competition. In addition to appearing as a soloist with distinguished ensembles, Han is active as a chamber and orchestral musician.



BRIDGET KIBBEY HARP

Extraordinary harpist Bridget Kibbey, called “the Yo-Yo Ma of the harp” (*Vogue*), is in demand for her virtuoso and soulful performances that transcend her instrument. At ease crossing classical, global and jazz genres, Kibbey dives deep into historical narratives while resonating within the vanguard of the new. According to *The New York Times*, “she made it seem as though her instrument had been waiting all its life to explode with the energetic figures and colors she was getting from it.” Kibbey is a winner of a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, Premier Prix at the Journées de la Harpe competition, made her NPR Tiny Desk solo debut, has appeared as concerto soloist with orchestras across the United States, Europe and the Middle East, and regularly appears on top performing arts series across North America. Kibbey recently released her newest solo record, *Crossing the Ocean*, on Pentatone to critical acclaim.



BORA KIM VIOLIN

Violinist Bora Kim is from Toronto, Canada, where she made her soloist debut with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in 2009, performing seven concerts at Roy Thomson Hall. She has also appeared as soloist with the Canadian Sinfonietta, Oakville Chamber Orchestra, Cathedral Bluffs Symphony Orchestra, Vermont Mozart Festival Orchestra and Niagara Chamber Orchestra. Highlights include concerts at Carnegie Hall, Merkin Hall and Steinway Hall, solo recitals across North America, Australia and the Netherlands, and chamber collaborations with Emanuel Ax, Yekwon Sunwoo and Sejong Soloists. Kim was a winner of the Canada Council’s Instrument Bank Competition, the Yale Chamber Music Competition and the Canadian Music Competitions. She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Yale School of Music, where she also completed two masters degrees. She received bachelor’s degrees in both violin and piano performance from the Colburn Conservatory, as the first double-major graduate in the school’s history.



SIWOO KIM VIOLIN

Siwoo Kim is an “incisive” and “compelling” (*The New York Times*) violinist who plays with “stylistic sensitivity and generous tonal nuance” (*Chicago Tribune*). He performs as soloist and chamber musician and is the co-founding artistic director of VIVO Music Festival in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio. Kim gave the world-premiere performance of Samuel Adler’s violin concerto, which was written for him, and recorded the work on Linn. He made his Carnegie Hall concerto debut in Stern Auditorium with The Juilliard Orchestra and has since performed with orchestras around the world, including the Brandenburgisches Staatsorchester Frankfurt, Columbus Symphony, Gangneung Philharmonic, Houston Symphony and many others. After studying under Roland and Almita Vamos at the Music Institute of Chicago, Kim studied at The Juilliard School under Robert Mann and Donald Weilerstein. He went on to complete a two-year fellowship with Carnegie Hall’s Ensemble Connect and spent summers at the Marlboro Music Festival. Kim performs on a 1753 “ex-Birkigt” Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin on generous loan through Rare Violins In Consortium.



HAN LASH HARP

Hailed by *The New York Times* as “striking and resourceful... handsomely brooding,” Han Lash’s music has been performed at such major venues as Carnegie Hall, Los Angeles’ Walt Disney Concert Hall, Lincoln Center, The Times Center in Manhattan, The Art Institute of Chicago, Tanglewood Music Center, Aspen Music Festival & School, among others. Han Lash’s chamber opera, *Desire*, premiered at Miller Centre Theatre Company to great acclaim. Lash’s Double Concerto for piano and harp was premiered by the Naples Philharmonic, and *Forestallings*, a musical response to Beethoven’s Symphony No. 2 in D major, was premiered by the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. Lash’s double harp concerto, *The Peril of Dreams*, was premiered by the Seattle Symphony Orchestra in November 2021 with the composer as one of the featured soloists. Han Lash’s music is published exclusively by Schott Music Corporation (New York).



MATTHEW LIPMAN VIOLA

American violist Matthew Lipman, praised by *The New York Times* for his “rich tone and elegant phrasing,” has made appearances with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, American Symphony Orchestra, Munich Symphony Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra. He has performed recitals at Carnegie Hall, Aspen Music Festival and the Zürich Tonhalle; was a featured soloist at the New World Symphony Viola Visions Festival; has appeared in chamber music with Anne-Sophie Mutter at the Berlin Philharmonie and Vienna Musikverein; and has recorded on Sony, Deutsche Grammophon, Cedille Records and Avie Records, the last of which being Mozart Sinfonia Concertante with Rachel Barton Pine and the late Sir Neville Marriner. An alum of the Bowers Program, he performs regularly on tour and at Alice Tully Hall with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, where he occupies the Wallach Chair. An Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient and major prize winner at the Primrose and Tertis International Viola Competitions, Lipman studied with Heidi Castleman at The Juilliard School and Tabea Zimmermann at the Kronberg Academy, and is on faculty at Stony Brook University.



RACHEL LOSEKE VIOLIN

Rachel Loseke grew up and began her music training in South Dakota. After high school, she attended the Cleveland Institute of Music and received a bachelor’s degree in violin performance. Loseke currently lives in Knoxville, Tennessee, where she is a core violinist with the Knoxville Symphony. In the past she played regularly with the San Diego Symphony and Orchestra Nova, and in 2011 she won First Place String Instrumentalist in the Grossmont Community Concert Association Competition. In 2018, Loseke took a sabbatical in New York City, where she had the opportunity to play as a substitute with the New York Philharmonic on several occasions. While in New York, she also won and held positions with the Cape Symphony and the Princeton Symphony. She has since resumed her position in the Knoxville Symphony and residence in Tennessee, where she maintains a small studio of students and performs with the Three Rivers String Quartet.



JIWEON RYU FLUTE

Admired for her “pure poetry” (*National Flute Association Chronicle*), Ji Weon Ryu has been the Principal Flute of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra since 2019 and is the first Asian wind principal in the orchestra’s history. Ryu has performed with distinguished ensembles including the New York Philharmonic and has been a soloist with the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra and the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. During recent summers, she has appeared at the Britt, Chautauqua, Verbier and Tanglewood Music Festivals. In the academic year 2022–2023, she served as a flute instructor at Louisiana State University.



DAVID SHIFRIN CLARINET

Winner of both the Avery Fisher Career Grant (1987) and the Avery Fisher Prize (2000), David Shifrin is in constant demand as an orchestral soloist, recitalist and chamber music collaborator. Shifrin has appeared as soloist with the orchestras of Philadelphia, Minnesota, Dallas, Seattle, Houston, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Phoenix, among many others in the United States and in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, Korea, China and Taiwan. A much sought-after chamber musician, he has collaborated with such distinguished artists as the Guarneri, Emerson, Orion, Dover and Miró Quartets, as well as Wynton Marsalis, André Watts, Emanuel Ax and André Previn. An artist member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center since 1989, Shifrin served as its Artistic Director from 1992 to 2004. He also served as Artistic Director of Portland’s Chamber Music Northwest from 1981 through 2020. Shifrin joined the faculty of the Yale School of Music in 1987, and in 2008 was appointed Artistic Director of Yale’s chamber music series on campus and at Carnegie Hall. He performs on Backun clarinets and Légère premium synthetic reeds.



SAM SUGGS DOUBLE BASS

Acknowledged for his “precise technique, interpretive vision, and impeccable musicianship” (*Boston Globe*), Sam Suggs cultivates a versatile career as a collaborative and creative bassist. He is one of *The Strad’s* “five up-and-coming bass players” and a winner of the International Society of Bassists and Concert Artists Guild solo competitions. As a bassist-composer, Suggs breaks traditional boundaries with “brilliant and compelling programming” (*The Strad*) and execution that “quite simply boggled the mind” (*Oregon Arts Watch*). An alum of the Greater Buffalo Youth Orchestra, Northwestern University, and Yale School of Music, he now serves on the faculties of the Yellow Barn Chamber Music Festival and James Madison University.



KOHEI YAMAGUCHI DOUBLE BASS

Kohei Yamaguchi is a member of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra as well as the principal bassist of the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra and Opera Theatre of Connecticut. In addition to performing in ensembles throughout Connecticut, he has had the opportunity to perform in prestigious venues worldwide including multiple performances at Carnegie Hall and touring with the Pacific Music Festival Orchestra in Japan. Yamaguchi earned his B.M. at the University of Michigan studying with Diana Gannett, Stephen Molina and Scott Pingel. During this time he was a double bass section member of the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra. Under the tutelage of Donald Palma, he earned M.M. and M.M.A. degrees at the Yale School of Music.

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Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA, USA

Photo © Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum / Bridgeman Images

Loeffler Octet group photo: Evan Chapman

Graeme Steele Johnson photo: Dylan Hancock

Headshot photos:

Stella Chen: Abigail Kralik / Matthew Cohen: Jiyang Chen / Samuel DeCaprio: Den Sweeney

Yun Han: Raymond Huang / Bridget Kibbey: Shervin Lainez / Bora Kim: Stella Sharpe

Siwoo Kim: Titilayo Ayangade / Han Lash: Ryan Scherb / Matthew Lipman: Abigail Kralik

Rachel Loseke: Aimee Rievley / Ji Weon Ryu: Sooyoung Oh / David Shifrin: Yuki Tei

Sam Suggs: Ryan Scherb / Kohei Yamaguchi: Rhyannon van Alstyne

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forgotten sounds

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

1. *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* 10:01

arranged by Graeme Steele Johnson for flute, clarinet,
harp, two violins, viola, cello and double bass

Ji Weon Ryu *flute*, Graeme Steele Johnson *clarinet*, Han Lash *harp*, Bora Kim *violin*,
Rachel Loseke *violin*, Matthew Cohen *viola*, Yun Han *cello*, Kohei Yamaguchi *double bass*

CHARLES MARTIN LOEFFLER (1861–1935)

2-4. *Octet for two clarinets, harp, two violins, viola, cello and double bass* *

composed 1897, revised and reconstructed 2021–2022
by Graeme Steele Johnson

I. *Allegro moderato* 10:59

II. *Adagio molto* 9:57

III. *Andante — Allegro alla Zingara* 10:24

Graeme Steele Johnson *clarinet*, David Shifrin *clarinet*, Bridget Kibbey *harp*, Stella Chen *violin*,
Siwoo Kim *violin*, Matthew Lipman *viola*, Samuel DeCaprio *cello*, Sam Suggs *double bass*

5. *Timbres oubliés* 3:53

adapted by Graeme Steele Johnson and Bridget Kibbey

Graeme Steele Johnson *clarinet*, Bridget Kibbey *harp*

Total Running Time 45:17

* World-premiere recording