

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HEARTSTRINGS

recorded October 24, 2012, Tel-Aviv Conservatory of Music, Avi Elbaz, recording engineer & editor

THE WATERS WRECKED THE SKY

recorded June 30, 2012, Distler Hall, Granoff Music Center, Tufts University, Joel Gordon, recording engineer & editor

THE NEAR BEYOND & TRIBUTE

recorded May 21, 2012, Skywalker Sound, San Rafael, California, Jason O'Connell, recording engineer & editor

PIANO QUARTET

recorded October 16, 2007, Skywalker Sound, San Rafael, California, Jack Vad, recording engineer, Jason O'Connell, editor

Mastered by Jason O'Connell

Tribute: C.F. Peters; all other works published by American Composers Alliance

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ROSS BAUER HEARTSTRINGS

Sarah Pelletier *soprano*
Lois Shapiro *piano*
Jean-Michel Fonteneau *cello*
Eric Zivian *piano*

Empyrean Ensemble
Left Coast Chamber Ensemble
Meitar Ensemble

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The Music

Ross Bauer's music is intensely lyrical, powerfully dramatic, harmonically rich and variegated, beautifully proportioned, rhythmically agile and dynamic, vibrantly hued, and emotionally and expressively generous. It is quite simply some of the finest and most elegantly crafted music that I know, and I am confident that the stellar performances on this disc will bear that out in countless ways as you come to know these works.

Ross began his musical life as a jazz saxophonist. "Jazz was my first love," he told me recently, "and I love it still." But he also was quick to note how difficult it is to pinpoint precisely which aspects of jazz are most germane to the music he writes now, those elements having long since been thoroughly absorbed, deeply ingrained and, of course, combined with myriad influences assimilated from the Western classical tradition. It is of course also true that there are natural affinities between much of the modern jazz that first captured his imagination and the musical innovations of the movers and shakers of the first decades of the twentieth century (e.g., the Second Viennese School, Stravinsky, and Bartók). Charlie Parker, for one, was strongly affected by encountering the works of Stravinsky, and at different times expressed a desire (ultimately unfulfilled) to study with two twentieth-century masters, Stefan Wolpe and Edgard Varèse. In Bauer's case, his experiences listening to jazz pioneers such as Parker, Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane were what ultimately drew him to a modernist sensibility as a composer, leading to his discovery of, engagement with and love for the music of Schoenberg, Berg, Varèse, Carter, Babbitt and other seminal figures.

However far below the surface of his music it might reside, Bauer makes it clear that at least one strand of his jazz background has left a vital imprint on his composing: "I do think that a sense of pulse and rhythmic aliveness is something that I got from playing and listening to jazz. In other words, an appreciation of a groove." I want to focus on this for just a moment, because it strikes me as crucial to understanding much about this music's formal cohesion and sense of continuity.

In jazz, rock, and other popular music, "groove" is most often understood to mean a recurring rhythmic pattern that underlies a pop tune or jazz improvisation. While that term can and often does refer to a type of continuously repeated rhythm that musicians call an *ostinato*, it would be misleading and confining to limit it — or at least to limit our understanding of how Bauer's experience of it applies to his music — in that way. The key to avoiding such limitations, I believe, lies in his use of the phrase "a sense of pulse and rhythmic aliveness," as well as in the recognition that a pulse, though it may at times be obvious to the ear, can also "underlie," i.e., exist and operate beneath, the musical surface.

How does this rhythmic aliveness manifest itself in Ross's music, and, more importantly, how does it, along with the equally important dimensions of melody, harmony, counterpoint, and phrasing, help him to

project the structure of the composition? In these works, as in much other music, the essential flow of a piece, the way it breathes, is inextricably tied to the way it moves in relation to a perceived beat (*tactus*). When perusing the scores of the pieces on this disc, one can see that the preponderance of the music is written in a strict tempo. That tempo may of course change within a movement or section, but for the most part, any sense of pushing or pulling is accomplished within the strictures of the basic speed of the moment, rather than by gradual acceleration, deceleration or momentary suspension of the pulse. In the purely instrumental pieces on this recording there are relatively few such disruptions of strictness; in the Dickinson song cycle, *The Waters Wrecked the Sky*, there are more, as would be expected in a work for voice, where expressive declamation of the text is paramount. Still, though linear suppleness and elasticity remain central, they are carefully balanced against the tightness of the rhythmic framework. A pulse may function in various ways: it can be strongly and clearly articulated. Alternatively, the surface layer of the music may deliberately work in opposition to a prevailing pulse, as in syncopation (emphasis on normally weaker or unaccented parts of a beat or bar). The pulse itself can be variable: a composer may use longer or shorter durations to give the impression of, respectively, slowing down and speeding up, all while retaining the basic tempo, or use different subdivisions of the basic beat to give the effect of changing the tempo without actually doing so. Different subdivisions also may be pitted against each other, conveying the impression of distinct, competing pulses. Even if the listener is not aware of the primary pulse at all times, it still is at work behind the scenes, and aids in keeping the rhythm tautly structured while allowing a maximum sense of flexibility in the music's unfolding. In other words, the "groove" is ever present, even when not immediately apparent, undergirding the music and ending it with strength and sinew, while simultaneously allowing the material atop it to blossom freely. Ross's experience with the rhythmic intricacies of jazz has developed his sensitivity to these possibilities to a very high degree, and all of them have a place in his music.

In the realm of pitch relationships, Bauer's notes are always exquisitely chosen, as eminently suitable for forming melodies as for coalescing into harmonies, and possessed of an air of rightness and inevitability. After years of experience, first as a young composer absorbing lessons from studying core repertoire, then as a mature artist, his means of choosing pitches has over time evolved into an intuitive one, reliant on the fineness of his exceptionally discerning ear. The depth and subtlety of his harmonic and contrapuntal fabric — where the working out of the delicate balance between the notes as components of beautiful lines and the notes as building blocks of beautiful chords occurs — are as critical to this dimension of the music as his personal conception of the "groove" is to his approach to rhythm, and he is equally unstinting in his careful attention to this facet of his art. Bauer's harmonic language encompasses a broad range of sonorities,

from simple triads to the most complex chords, forming a continuum from greater to lesser degrees of stability and tension, selected in accordance with the specific musical context. His deployment of instrumental color similarly demonstrates careful attention to detail and aptness of expression. The emotional range of the music is equally extensive, as passionate lyricism is leavened with moments of lightness and transparency. In fact, this recording is bookended by two examples of just such a leavening: *Heartstrings*, which opens the disc, and the final movement of the Piano Quartet, which closes it: both evince a refreshing overall fleetness and grace.

Heartstrings manifests many of the characteristics enumerated above, and is in many respects a perfect introduction to Ross's work, as well as to this recording. This piece, which the composer thinks of as being rather pastoral in character, is in three sections of unequal lengths and contrasting tempi, the first two of which are signaled by unaccompanied flute solos, and the last by a sudden return to a much faster tempo. By turns breezy, dance-like, mesmerizing, occasionally edgy, sensuous and sinuous, it also is particularly illustrative of the inclusive nature of Bauer's melodic and harmonic language, seamlessly incorporating elements that strongly suggest tonality. One such element is a simple melody initially heard about a minute and ten seconds into the piece, first in the violin, and immediately echoed in the flute. This tune returns in an almost literal form near the end (around 9:33), providing a satisfying sense of recapitulation. Timbral delights along the way include percussive effects in the flute at around 4:15, including "tongue stops," which allow the flute to produce much lower pitches than it normally can, and some crystalline high harmonics in the strings about a minute later. Its title notwithstanding, there is nothing obviously sentimental about *Heartstrings*, and there are no programmatic or extramusical references. The Meitar Ensemble, for whom the work was composed, takes its name from the Hebrew word meaning "string." Ross was especially happy to have an opportunity to feature the group's flutist, Roy Amotz, who, along with the other members of the group, plays with what the composer describes as a lot of "heart," hence the title.

The Waters Wrecked the Sky, composed for the artists heard on this recording, Sarah Pelletier and Lois Shapiro, packs a tremendous amount of vividly dramatic contrasts into a short space, from the piano's evocation of a gathering thunderstorm in "The Wind began to rock the Grass" to the achingly autumnal richness of the harmonies that presage the summer's end in the fifth and final song, "As imperceptibly as Grief." The vocal lines are impeccably tailored to the poetry. "As with all of Dickinson's work," Bauer writes, "these poems are very musical — both in the sound of their language, and in their construction. The poems I've chosen are linked by their nature/tree imagery, their clarity and concision, and their sometimes quiet, sometimes overt expression of ecstasy." He certainly has identified the choicest spaces within and around Dickinson's words that his music can inhabit. In a unique, striking and — to me — inspired instance,

Bauer, at the very end of the first song, has called for the singer to speak rather than sing the last line. Any composer who has written for the voice can attest that combining spoken and sung text within a piece can be tricky, but here the two modes of conveying the poetry dovetail perfectly, and the effect is magical.

The Near Beyond, for clarinet and string trio, was composed in 2005 for clarinetist Peter Josheff and the Empeyrean Ensemble, the new music group that Bauer founded and ran from 1988 until 2001 at the University of California at Davis, and dedicated to the memory of Lois Jones, an early and enthusiastic supporter of the ensemble. Lasting about ten minutes, it has some of the buoyancy and light spirit of *Heartstrings*, but with more intense exploration of some of the more intricate aspects of Ross's "groove" idea: to wit, passages where several different pulses hold sway at the same time, giving rise at times to what sounds like a rather heady brew of multiple simultaneous tempi. A fairly straightforward example occurs just before two minutes have passed, when you will hear a clear pulse set up in the cello, taken up by the viola and then the violin, in an almost march-like rhythm. This pulse is in fact not the notated pulse, but is being played *against* the main beat, which is silently felt by the performers. Soon this perceived pulse is complicated by less rhythmically regular, more rhapsodic sounding material in the clarinet, and other competing, faster pulses in the other instruments. This soon leads into a faster section, marked "playfully rhythmic," in which the strings, playing pizzicato in octaves and in rhythmic unison, are pitted against faster, syncopated, jazzy sounding figures in the clarinet. The only genuinely slow music occurs in the final section of the work, a beautiful passage marked "with restrained lyricism," where a non-literal reminiscence of the opening material of the piece is presented, this time led by the clarinet.

Tribute, composed in 2000 in honor of the eightieth birthday of the distinguished American composer Andrew Imbrie, was written for cellist Fred Sherry and pianist Gilbert Kalish. It lasts approximately 5 minutes. The relatively compressed time frame (as compared with the other pieces on this CD) lends an excitement and volatility that are obvious from the very beginning. Ross in his program note for the piece has commented on the tension created as the music unfolds, as "various musical directions are suggested, but are usually cut off, often rather prematurely." Before even a minute has transpired, we can hear portents of this in the opening cello solo, as the dynamics and character change precipitously, even from one bar to the next. This rapid turnover of events becomes even more pronounced once the piano has entered. The rhythmic language of the piece gradually becomes more driving as it continues; at the beginning the sense of pulse is often highly variable, but gradually becomes much more pronounced. Additionally, the degree of independence of the two instruments changes over the course of the work. When the piano first enters, for example, it is on pitches just played by the cello, but before it can be heard as merely imitating or "shadowing," it instantly

diverges rhythmically as well as in terms of pitch, and this dance of convergence and divergence between the cello and piano becomes a significant force. At around 2:50 the piano is playing a continuous sixteenth-note texture that contains pitches doubling those in the long sustained line of the cello. The ultimate convergence takes place just before the end, when, after a barrage of repeated notes, the two instruments play in unison for the very first time. The effect is both relentless and exhilarating.

Commissioned by the Stony Brook Chamber Players, Bauer's Piano Quartet is noteworthy among the pieces on this disc for several reasons. It is, for example, remarkably leaner in texture than much of his other music. The piano part, for example, is very often playing single lines or at most two-part counterpoint, particularly in the first and third movements of the piece. This spareness helps to point up very clearly some of the rhythmic play so important to these outer movements, especially the illusion of tempo change created simply by changing the subdivision of the basic pulse. An excellent illustration of this occurs within the first 30 seconds or so, when the piano suddenly moves from a constant beat that divides into three equal parts to the same pulse divided into four. Another unifying aspect of this work is the principle of dialogue. For much of the piece the piano and strings are treated as independent entities, responding to each other in alternation and only occasionally playing together. A particularly arresting example of the latter occurs in the first movement, about two thirds of the way through, when the strings play very lyrical music against mostly staccato (and deliciously crunchy) piano chords. The middle movement provides welcome contrast, with its slow tempo and much more reserved dynamic palette. Beginning with a spare duo for muted violin and cello, and featuring a warmly songful piano solo shortly thereafter, it also retains the overall separation of the two instrumental units (piano vs. strings). The final movement begins with yet another dialogue, and its emphasis on octaves reinforces the overall cleanness, leanness and openness of the overall sonority, as well as lending an appealing lightness, and — above all — sense of fun to the proceedings, no more so than in the unexpected, gracefully achieved, and witty (in the truest and best sense) ending, both to the piece as well as to this disc.

Ross Bauer is a consummate composer, deeply committed to and eminently capable of writing music exhibiting not only the utmost skill and integrity, but also the sincere desire to connect with and present his best to his listeners. As you join their ranks, I feel certain that the rewards and delights that await you will be many as you encounter Ross's music for the first time, and will only increase as you continue to revisit it.

— *Hayes Biggs*, © 2013

Hayes Biggs is a composer whose works have been heard across the United States and internationally and who teaches at Manhattan School of Music.

Texts

The Waters Wrecked the Sky
Five Poems of Emily Dickinson

I. 824

The Wind begun to rock the Grass
With threatening Tunes and low—
He threw a Menace at the Earth—
A Menace at the Sky.

The Leaves unhooked themselves from Trees—
And started all abroad
The Dust did scoop itself like Hands
And threw away the Road.

The Wagons quickened on the Streets
The Thunder hurried slow—
The Lightning showed a Yellow Beak
And then a livid Claw.

The Birds put up the Bars to Nests—
The Cattle fled to Barns—
There came one drop of Giant Rain
And then as if the Hands

That held the Dams had parted hold
The Waters Wrecked the Sky,
But overlooked my Father's House—
Just quartering a Tree—

II. 1650

A lane of Yellow led the eye
Unto a Purple Wood
Whose soft inhabitants to be
Surpasses solitude

If Bird the silence contradict
Or flower presume to show
In that low summer of the West
Impossible to know—

III. 1397

It sounded as if the streets were running
And then — the streets stood still —
Eclipse — was all we could see at the Window
And Awe — was all we could feel.
By and by — the boldest stole out of his Covert
To see if Time was there —
Nature was in an Opal Apron,
Mixing fresher Air.

IV. 1669

In snow thou comest —
Thou shalt go with the resuming ground,
The sweet derision of the crow,
And Glee's advancing sound.

In fear thou comest —
Thou shalt go at such a gait of joy
That man anew embark to live
Upon the depth of thee.

V. 1540

As imperceptibly as Grief
The Summer lapsed away—
Too imperceptible at last
To seem like Perfidy—
A Quietness distilled
As Twilight long begun,
Or Nature spending with herself
Sequestered Afternoon—
The Dusk drew earlier in—
The Morning foreign shone—
A courteous, yet harrowing Grace,
As Guest, that would be gone—
And thus, without a Wing
Or service of a Keel
Our Summer made her light escape
Into the Beautiful.

The Composer



Ross Bauer's music has been performed and recorded by the Alexander and Arianna Quartets, Sequitur, the Triple Helix and the Albers Trios, the New York New Music Ensemble, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the Left Coast Ensemble, sopranos Susan Narucki, Christine Schadeberg, and Sarah Pelletier, violinist Curt Macomber, and others. His work is published by C.F. Peters and ACA, and recorded on the Albany, GM, Centaur, and New World labels. Recognition has come from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in the form of a 2005 Academy Award in Music and the Walter Hinrichsen Award. Other honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, two Fromm Foundation commissions, Barlow and Koussevitzky commissions, and an NEA Composition Fellowship. Bauer teaches composition and theory at the University of California, Davis and has also taught at Stanford and Brandeis Universities. He attended New England Conservatory and Brandeis studying composition with John Heiss, Martin Boykan, Arthur Berger, and Luciano Berio (at Tanglewood).

The Performers



Praised by the *New York Times* for their “excellence, poise and precision,” the **Meitar Ensemble**, founded in 2004 by artistic director Amit Dolberg, has established itself as a prominent array of virtuosos specializing in contemporary music. Based in Tel-Aviv, they have been featured at some of the most prestigious venues worldwide, including the Centre Pompidou, (Paris), the Purcell Room, (London), the Radial System, BKA, (Berlin), the Moscow Conservatory, Yale University, the “Nuovi Spazi Musicali” Festival (Rome), the Heidelberg Biennale for Contemporary Music, and the Sound Ways Festival (St. Petersburg). They have held residencies at Music at the Anthology-MATA (New York), Dartmouth University, and the Zeitkunst Festival (Berlin), and are ensemble in residence at the Israeli Conservatory, Tel Aviv. Their recordings can be heard on the Spanish label VERSO, the American label Albany Records, as well as on a number of CDs on Israeli labels.



Soprano **Sarah Pelletier**'s past season highlights include Debussy *La Damoselle Elue* with Bard Festival; Britten *Midsummer Night's Dream* with Aldeburgh Festival, U.K.; Britten *War Requiem* and Berg *Wozzeck* with New England Philharmonic; Bach *B minor Mass* with San Francisco Bach Choir; Handel *Messiah* with New Jersey Symphony Orchestra; *Ariodante* with Emmanuel Music; and *Sweeney Todd* with Princeton Festival Opera.

Ms. Pelletier performed *Madama Butterfly* and *Peter Grimes* with Maestro Seiji Ozawa at Saito Kinen Festival, Japan and Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. She received Vocal Fellowships at Tanglewood and Ravinia and has presented solo recitals at Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and Goethe Institute and at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage. Her interest in contemporary music has led to performances under the direction of Lukas Foss, Robert Spano, and John Harbison, with performances at Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music, "Music in Time Series" at Spoleto Festival USA, and Santa Fe New Music.



Lois Shapiro has performed throughout the US and abroad. A winner of the prestigious Concert Artists Guild Award, she has recorded on Bridge, Afka, MLR, MSR, Centaur, Channel Classics, Pierrot, and MLAR. Ms. Shapiro has been a guest artist at Columbia University, the Frick Collection, the Phillips Collection, Corcoran Gallery and National Gallery (American Music Festival) in Washington, D.C., the Rialto Center in Atlanta,

Museum of Fine Arts and Jordan Hall in Boston; the Dame Myra Hess Concert Series and the Chicago Art Institute; the Vancouver Chamber Music Festival, and the Museum Vleeshuis in Antwerp, Belgium. In 1995, she and her piano trio Triple Helix were cited by the Boston Globe as one of the top chamber ensembles of Boston, and chosen as Musicians of the Year in 2000. Formerly an instructor of piano at Smith College, Brandeis University, New England Conservatory, and the Longy School of Music, Ms. Shapiro is currently on the faculty of Wellesley College.



The Emphyrean Ensemble presents engaging, thought-provokingly eclectic programs, enabling audiences to experience new musical sensations delivered with high artistry by its seven extraordinary core players — the finest new music performers in California. Ensemble-in-residence at UC Davis for over twenty years, Emphyrean has premiered approximately two hundred works and performed throughout California, including appearances at many prominent music festivals and concert series.



A founding member of the award-winning Ravel String Quartet, **Jean-Michel Fonteneau** performs frequently with such renowned artists as Leon Fleisher, Menahem Pressler, Gilbert Kalish, Claude Frank, Peter Frankl, Kim Kashkashian, and with members of the Amadeus, Juilliard, and Pro Arte Quartets. He appears regularly at summer festivals including the Yellow Barn Music Festival, the Morges Summer Academy in Switzerland, Domaine Forget, Oberlin at Casalmaggiore, MYA, and ARIA. He has been on the faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music since 1999.



Pianist **Eric Zivian** is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, the Juilliard School, and the Yale School of Music. He studied composition with Ned Rorem, Jacob Druckman, and Martin Bresnick and piano with Gary Graffman and Peter Serkin. He attended the Tanglewood Music Center both as a composer and as a performer, studying composition with Oliver Knussen and Alexander Goehr. He has also attended summer programs in composition at the Scotia Music Festival, June in Buffalo and the Wellesley Composers' Conference. Mr. Zivian's compositions have been performed widely in the U. S. and Japan, and have earned him numerous prizes.



Founded in 1992, **Left Coast Chamber Ensemble** presents innovative programs that link new and old chamber music, embracing both musics to reawaken a feeling of immediacy in performances of familiar masterpieces and reveal the expressive intentions of the music of our time. The ensemble's twelve musicians, many of whom have played together since the 1980s, perform in different combinations, using strings, winds, guitar and piano to present a wide range of repertoire. Recipients of grants from New Music USA, the Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation, San Francisco Grants for the Arts, the Clarence E. Heller Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund for New Music, and many others, Left Coast has commissioned and performed over 75 new works, sponsors an annual composition contest, participates as the western regional partner in the Rapido! Composition Contest, and conducts educational programs at Oakland School for the Arts and San Francisco's International High School. The ensemble presents a series of five subscription concerts annually in San Francisco and Mill Valley, California.