

THEN AND NOW

CHAMBER MUSIC OF RICHARD FESTINGER

CALEFAX • CYGNUS & JOHN FERRARI • COLLAGE NEW MUSIC
WINDSCAPE • ALAN R. KAY • MICHAEL NICOLAS



Richard Festinger

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CHAMBER MUSIC OF **RICHARD FESTINGER**

Richard Festinger (1948)

- 1 **Invocation** *for reed quintet* (2019) 10:28

Calefax

Oliver Boekhoorn, oboe • Lars Wouters van den
Oudenweijer, clarinet • Raaf Hekkema, alto saxophone
Jelte Althus, bass clarinet • Alban Wesley, bassoon

- 2 **To a Pilgrim** *for bass clarinet and cello* (2001) 9:28

Alan R. Kay, bass clarinet • Michael Nicolas, cello

- 3 **Hidden Spring** (2004) 14:17

for flute, oboe, violin, cello and two guitars

Cygnus

Tara Helen O'Connor, flutes
James Austin Smith, oboe & English horn
Calvin Wiersma, violin • Natasha Brofsky, cello
Oren Fader, guitar • William Anderson, guitar & mandolin
John Ferrari, conductor

- Il était une fois...** (2022)

for violin, cello and piano

- 4 i. Moderato 6:55
5 ii. Andante 6:38
6 iii. Allegro 4:23

Collage New Music

Catherine French, violin • Jan Müller-Szeraws, cello
Christopher Oldfather, piano

- Windsongs** *for wind quintet* (1996)

- 7 i. Presto energico 1:36
8 ii. Lento 2:49
9 iii. Allegro 1:58

Windscape

Tara Helen O'Connor, flute • Randall Ellis, oboe
Alan R. Kaye, clarinet • David Jolley, horn
Frank Morelli, bassoon

Total Time: 56:38

Richard Festinger — Five Chamber Works

In recent years, some composers have shifted away from Western classical music's principles of pitch, harmony, and counterpoint as building materials, and have instead embraced extended performing techniques, microtones, texture, and aleatory as primary compositional devices. The exodus, to some degree, grew out of challenges in creating expressive and coherent music that is both richly chromatic and non-tonal. Of course, composing expressive and convincing music has always required great skill and imagination, regardless of the musical language: witness the compositions by Haydn's and Mozart's contemporaries that, despite similar idioms, add up to little more than the moment-to-moment.

Regardless, many other composers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have remained drawn to, and have acquired the technique and imagination to realize, the expressive possibilities within fully chromatic languages. Nicholas Maw, John Harbison, Joan Tower, Fred Lerdahl, Peter Lieberson, Oliver Knussen, Stephen Hartke, and Tobias Picker — all born in the mid-twentieth century — are a few of these most persuasive voices. Among such distinguished composers, Richard Festinger stands tall. He consistently

produces sophisticated, fresh, and vivid music that is guided by an ear responsive to the vitality of pitches, harmony, counterpoint, and phrases. In short, he composes music that *breathes*.

Festinger's musical roots lie in two areas. Studies with influential jazz musicians Herb Pomeroy (1930-2007) and Gary Burton (b.1943), as well as his years as a practicing jazz guitarist, certainly prompt some of his music's propulsive energy and melodic designs — although this listener doesn't hear this music as obviously jazzy. Even more influential were his studies with Andrew Imbrie (1921-2007), a marvelous composer for whom the pitches and their relationships were always of paramount importance.

Richard Festinger's more than eighty compositions include orchestral, choral, and instrumental chamber works (both with, and without, voice), all born of refined musical skills and a fertile imagination. This recording includes five chamber works he composed between 1996 (*Windsongs*) and 2022 (*Il était une fois...*). The instrumental combinations vary highly, from a duet for bass clarinet and cello (*To a Pilgrim*), to an unusual sextet for woodwinds, strings and

plucked instruments (*Hidden Spring*), and to the traditional ensembles of piano trio and wind quintet (*Il était une fois...*, *Windsongs*, respectively). All five works arise from a consistent and personal voice, and the music is eloquent, often luminous, and always vibrant.

Invocation was composed in 1991, for the Calefax Reed Ensemble, a long-standing Dutch ensemble specializing in newly commissioned works and orchestrations of extant repertoire. This single-movement composition is for five woodwind instruments that, together, have considerable intensity: oboe, clarinet, alto saxophone, bass clarinet, and bassoon.

Invocation begins with a gentle call-and-response between saxophone and clarinet, whose phrases suggest, but do not mimic, each other. As the oboe, bass clarinet and bassoon join, all five instruments begin to wrap around each other in a web of subtly connected counterpoint. The oboe then launches a lively second section, and the others follow in kind. Briefly, this lighter music turns muscular, but it loses steam and fades to the end of the section.

Calm, chorale-like music in the clarinet, saxophone, bass clarinet and bassoon forms a bed over which the oboe spins a recitative — first summoning, then sinuous. When the accompanying quartet also begins to move, the music seems to head into a new section, but the oboe persists in its free-wheeling recitative. As the music accelerates, all five voices join in fluent counterpoint, before pushing into a slower, dramatically rhetorical section. The playful character from earlier returns, but the energy soon calms. Now quiet, the

saxophone recalls the opening, and the end seems to approach. But agitated music suddenly cuts in, and *Invocation* sweeps to a loud — and unexpected — close.

To a Pilgrim, a duet for bass clarinet and cello, carries the inscription, *In memoriam Andrew Welsh Imbrie, La fine è l'inizio* — “the end is the beginning” — and, of the five works on this recording, most strongly evokes that of Festinger’s mentor and friend. Suggestive, not literal, imitations between the instruments, as well as wide, sweeping lines, evoke something of Imbrie’s *Pilgrimage*, *Spring Fever*, or *Adam*, and the duet’s expansive phrases remind this listener of the way that music moves and breathes.

That said, Imbrie favored bright, bracing harmonies (such as minor 2nds or perfect fourths), while *To a Pilgrim* leans toward softer ones, (such as thirds, sixths, and major 2nds) and the overall character is gentle and personal. Even though the tone is often mellow — the timbres of the two instruments themselves encourage warmth — *To a Pilgrim*’s homage to Imbrie’s invigorating music cannot be mistaken.

The two low-pitched instruments begin quietly in their bottom registers, and as they begin to prod each other, the players seem to improvise their responses. When a well-earned momentum breaks off, shadowy tremolos in the cello mark a breath before the second section. Now animated, the bass clarinet bubbles, the cello answers in kind, and the counterpoint tightens. Then, after an unexpected silence, the cello begins to intone a long-note line, suggestive of a Bach cantata *cantus firmus*, while the bass clarinet encircles

excitedly. Again, the instruments begin to intertwine, but they rarely find rhythmic unanimity.

Not until about two-thirds through *To a Pilgrim* do the bass clarinet and cello lock together. Tossing back and forth snappy gestures — like a medieval hocket — they launch a series of five brief canons, each of which is at a strict pitch interval — minor 9th, major 3rd, perfect 4th, major 2nd, minor 3rd, respectively — but they remain quite free in their imitation of rhythms and melodic contours. (For instance, an ascending major sixth in the leading instrument may be answered by a descending minor third in the second, thus masking the strict imitations that traditionally make canons audible as such.) The section ends in a hovering, gentle cadence.

Over slow, ghostly double-stop harmonics in the cello (another *cantus firmus*?), the bass clarinet restlessly dances. Again, the cello turns to join the bass clarinet in playful interactions, and they gradually accelerate into the climax. The final section, now more relaxed, recalls the duet's beginning, and it even briefly settles on the opening harmony — *the end is the beginning*. But the music pushes on, rising up quickly before it sinks to a two-note sigh that resolves less than it alludes to some unknown beyond.

To this listener, *To a Pilgrim*'s affectionate tone, rich contrapuntal fabric, two *cantus firmus* sections, and five canons all suggest something of Festinger's gratitude for the wise and meticulous training he undoubtedly received from the work's dedicatee.

Much of the character of *Invocation* arises from those five woodwinds' singing intensity. And the supple colors of the bass clarinet and cello in *To a Pilgrim* create some of that work's character. Likewise, **Hidden Spring**'s ensemble, a group of six musicians who play nine instruments — flute/alto flute, oboe/English horn, violin, cello, guitar, and guitar/mandolin — generates not only this work's elegant sound, but also the manner in which it unfolds.

Festinger's skills as a guitarist undoubtedly afford him uncommon comfort in writing for the guitars, and with impressive deftness, he creates music for these two players far more intricate than would ever be possible with only one. Frequently, the two interweave to create a sort of super-guitar; similarly, the two woodwinds often pair, as do the two strings. Because all of the instruments live in somewhat similar registers (only the cello offers any sustained low notes), the instruments easily disappear into each other in unisons and brief dovetails. Phrase groups tend to materialize and then evaporate, softening any distinct boundaries. At one moment, the music hovers in mid-air; in the next, it scurries. To this listener, *Hidden Spring*'s charged, precise elegance breathes the air of Boulez's *Dérive 1*, or even Ravel's *Trois poèmes de Mallarmé*, crystalline works that, too, are at once immobile and nimble.

Festinger writes, "The title *Hidden Spring*, taken from a line in a poem of Robert Frost, alludes here to the idea of a source from which the music flows, but a source that is only felt, and not quite discernible. The aesthetic shares something with abstract expressionist painting, where expressivity

is a property of the gestures themselves, rather than of a depiction of something familiar.”

Festinger composed his trio for violin, cello and piano, **Il était une fois...**, for the 50th anniversary of Boston-based Collage New Music, an ensemble that has frequently performed his music.

The trio’s first of three movements organizes along paths reminiscent of typical 18th and 19th century musical designs: a sonata form, complete with introduction, exposition (made up of two smaller subsections), development, and recapitulation. Opening declamatory chords almost immediately relax into a fluid violin-cello duet, but forceful piano chords interrupt the strings and then quickly lose energy. Without any pause, the movement’s restless exposition begins. The violin and cello play off each other, and the piano interjects both related ideas and energizing harmonic support. A striking passage of repeated sixteenth notes in the strings briefly marks the middle of the exposition’s first section, but the contrapuntal music, yet more excited, pushes them aside. Suddenly, an expansive cello solo appears (accompanied by the piano) and becomes the contrasting second part of the exposition. This solo flows elegantly into the exposition’s haunting closing material.

A brief *crescendo* propels the end of the exposition into the development, and edgy imitations among the instruments again prevail. The repeated notes of the exposition begin to reappear and, picking up speed, they take over and plummet the work back into the clangorous introduction. (A

return of introductory material after the development is rare in sonata-form music, although a prominent example can be heard in the first movement of Schubert’s Octet in F, D. 803.) The recapitulation is easily recognized, but this material is greatly foreshortened, in part because the repeated notes from earlier are absent—having fulfilled their role in the development, there is no need for their return here. More importantly, however, the expressive cello solo from the exposition is also gone. The resulting imbalance leaves the recapitulation, which would typically resolve earlier musical questions, in an unsettled place.

About the missing cello music (and the slow movement), Festinger writes, “That lyrical theme logically enough becomes the framing idea of the second movement, in the midst of which a contrasting middle section evolves out of some intricate counterpoint between violin and cello.”

The third movement erupts with a splintering frenzy, but it quickly coalesces into exuberant, sailing music; the two strings come to form a unit, and the piano accompanies. Fragmented ideas from the beginning momentarily interrupt the flow, but the high spirits are irresistible, and they swiftly return, whirling forward. Finally, the movement begins to disappear, but at the last second, a reviving line in the piano catapults to a loud, sharp chord, and all the instruments, now motionless, fade.

Festinger composed **Windsongs** in 1996, for the San Francisco-based City Winds woodwind quintet. While *Il était une fois....* may be the most intense of the five works

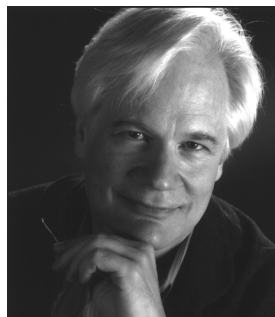
gathered on this recording, *Windsongs* may be the frothiest. A virtuosic first movement races by in an unbroken stream of sixteenth notes that pass seamlessly among the four woodwind instruments. While the horn and bassoon (and later, the oboe and horn) do offer competing ideas, the running sixteenth notes are unstoppable. When the inexorable river slackens even for a moment, the flute resists by flying to the top, and all finish, suddenly frozen.

Soft-edged, chorale-like music opens the slow movement. The texture is mostly in four parts, but the combinations of instruments change fluently and almost imperceptibly. Then, the oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon lay down nearly stationary chords, while the flute fulfills its time-honored role as a warbling bird. The oboe tries to imitate the flute, but it gives up, and the movement ends with all the instruments perched in widely separated registers.

The last movement, the most involved and mischievous of the three, flings about brusque, jumpy gestures, with the instruments clustering in unpredictable and hastily shifting duets, trios, or quartets. Trills, ordinarily an ornament, add to the commotion, and instead of being hurried (like the first movement), the movement is harried and flustered. In the final moments, the flute, oboe and clarinet splinter off, each swooping alone, and the quintet comes together with a final snap.

The vitality of Richard Festinger's creativity is unmistakable in these five works. Remarkable—and admirable—is the consistency of his musical language, even as none of the five compositions sounds like any of the others. The clarity, expressivity and range of these works reaffirm that, (to mis-quote Schoenberg), "a great deal of music remains to be written with *harmony, counterpoint, and phrases.*"

— David Hoose



David Hoose is Music Director *emeritus* of two Boston musical organizations: Collage New Music and Cantata Singers & Ensemble. He is also Professor *emeritus* at Boston University, where he was the School of Music's Director of Orchestras and taught conducting for twenty-nine years.

Richard Festinger has been a prominent and highly regarded figure in American contemporary music since the early 1980's. An early interest in jazz in the 1970's took him to Boston, where he worked with Gary Burton, Herb Pomeroy and Mick Goodrick at the Berklee School of Music, and he subsequently led his own groups as a jazz performer in the San Francisco Bay area before studying composition with Andrew Imbrie at the University of California in Berkeley.

Festinger's work as a composer, comprising more than 80 compositions across a wide variety of genres, has been widely recognized for its elegance and emotive power. Frank J. Oteri, writing for the 2011 Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music, describes Festinger's music as "notable for its combination of propulsive energy with an impeccable sense of poise and balance." In his article on Festinger's recordings in the *Journal of the Society for American Music*, Joshua Levine writes of Festinger's work as "vibrant, skillfully wrought... intellectually and viscerally compelling music." WQXR Radio has called him "an American master."

The numerous awards and honors that have accrued to him include major commissions from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Fromm Foundation at Harvard University, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Aaron Copland Fund for music, the Argosy and Barlow Foundations, the Philadelphia Music Project, and the American Composers Forum. He is a recipient of the George Ladd Grand Prix de Paris, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters has twice recognized his work, with both the Walter Hinrichsen Award and an Academy Recording Award.

Some notable recent commissions include his *String Quartet No. 3* (2015), commissioned by the Serge Koussevitzky Foundation for the Afiara Quartet; *Cummings Settings* (2016), written for the Resonant Bodies Festival in New York; the song cycle *Careless Love* (2017) written for the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players; *Icarus in Flight* (2018), commissioned by the Climate Music Project for the Telegraph String Quartet; the cantata for chorus and chamber orchestra *Worlds Apart* (2020), written for the Boston Cantata Singers; and his *String Quartet No. 5* (2021).

A longtime resident of Northern California, in 1985 Festinger founded the well-known San Francisco based contemporary music ensemble Earplay, which he continues to direct. In 1990 he joined the music faculty of San Francisco State University as professor of music theory and composition, and served from 2010 to 2018 as Artistic Director of the Morrison Artists Series, San Francisco's longest established presenter of professional chamber music concerts. He serves on the boards of Earplay, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the Irving M. Klein International String Competition, and the League of Composers/International Society for Contemporary music. More recordings of his works are available on the Bridge, Centaur, CRI, CRS and Naxos International labels.

PERFORMERS



Calefax is a close-knit ensemble of five reed players united by a shared passion. For thirty-five years they have been acclaimed in the Netherlands and abroad for their virtuosic playing, brilliant arrangements and innovative stage presentation. They are the inventors of a completely new genre: the reed quintet. They provide inspiration to young wind players from all over the world who follow in their footsteps. Calefax can be defined as a classical ensemble with a pop mentality.

Calefax takes an adventurous approach to presenting its programs, and has an astonishingly varied repertoire ranging from 1100 to the present day. They perform their own arrangements and newly commissioned compositions for the combination of oboe, clarinet, saxophone, bass clarinet and bassoon. Calefax is open to the influence of world music, jazz and improvisation as a result of countless international tours and collaborations with all kinds of musicians.



Created in 1994 by five eminent woodwind soloists, **Windscape** has won a unique place for itself as a vibrant, ever-evolving group of musical individualists, which has delighted audiences throughout North America. Windscape's innovative programs and accompanying presentations are created to take listeners on a musical and historical world tour, evoking through music and engaging commentary vivid cultural landscapes of different times and places.

As Artists-in-Residence at the Manhattan School of Music, the members of Windscape are master teachers, imparting not only the craft of instrumental virtuosity, but also presenting a distinctive concert series hailed for its creative energy and musical curiosity. The series offers the perfect setting for the ensemble to devise new, sometimes startling programs and to experiment with new arrangements and repertoire combinations.



With its pairs of plucked strings, bowed strings and woodwinds, **Cygnus** has a precedent in the Elizabethan “broken consort”. The members — Tara Helen O’Connor, flute; James Austin Smith, oboe; William Anderson and Oren Fader, classical and electric guitars/mandolin/banjo; Calvin Wiersma, violin; Natasha Brofsky, violoncello — are all virtuoso players with a great wealth of experience with some of our most cherished musical institutions, including the New York Philharmonic, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and the Metropolitan Opera Chamber Players.

Cygnus is one of the most intriguing new music ensembles to have emerged in recent years. With its mixed instrumentation Cygnus offers the present day composer a bold new spectrum of colorful combinations to write for. Given the ensemble’s devotion to commissioning new repertoire from a stylistically broad range of composers, combined with the virtuosity with which these pieces are performed, Cygnus presents a consistently exotic and entertaining listening experience.



Praised by the Boston Musical Intelligencer as “among the finest artists of contemporary (or any other) music,” the musicians of **Collage New Music** include some of the most outstanding instrumentalists and singers skilled in the musical intricacies, technical virtuosity, and emotional depth that new music requires. The ensemble includes some of the East Coast’s finest musicians, including members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the area’s extraordinary freelance community.

Collage’s five decades of compelling music-making have placed it as a leader among adventurous ensembles that nurture the vital intersection of composer, performer, and listener. The ensemble’s repertoire, both wide and deep, reaches from classical twentieth century works, to extraordinary less-known older works, and to marvelous, brand-new creations of American composers. Its diverse programs include solo repertoire, music for larger ensembles, theatrical works, fully-staged chamber operas, and music with extensive electronics.



A “long-admired figure on the New York scene,” (The New Yorker), cellist **Michael Nicolas** enjoys a diverse career as chamber musician, soloist, recording artist, and improviser. He is the cellist of the intrepid and genre-defying string quartet Brooklyn Rider, which has drawn praise from classical, world music, and rock critics alike. As a member of the acclaimed International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), he has worked with countless composers from around the world, premiering and recording dozens of new works. Another group, Third Sound, which Michael helped found, made its debut with an historic residency at the 2015 Havana Contemporary Music Festival, in Cuba. His solo album *Transitions* is available on the Sono Luminus record label.



Praised by the New York Times for his “spell-binding” performances and “infectious enthusiasm and panache”, **Alan R. Kay** is Co-Principal Clarinetist and a former Artistic Director of Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and serves as Principal Clarinet with New York’s Riverside Symphony and the Little Orchestra Society. He also performs as principal with the American Symphony and the Orchestra of St. Luke’s. Mr. Kay is a founding

member of Windscape, and appears regularly with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He teaches at the Manhattan School of Music, The Juilliard School and Stony Brook University. His arrangements for wind quintet are available at Trevco Music Publishing and International Opus.

Active in classical, jazz, pop, Broadway, film, television, dance music, the avant-garde, and multimedia, **John Ferrari** appears on dozens of recordings as percussionist and conductor. He is a founding member of the Naumburg Award winning New Millennium Ensemble, a regular guest artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and Chamber Music Northwest, and has been a member of Meridian Arts Ensemble since 1993. Mr. Ferrari has also appeared and/or recorded with organizations such as Bang On A Can All-Stars, Da Capo Chamber Players, Manhattan Sinfonietta, Orpheus Chamber Players, Riverside Symphony, Cygnus and many others. He teaches at William Paterson University, the Manhattan School of Music, and the Elisabeth Morrow School.

CREDITS

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at Dreamflower Acoustic, West Center Church, Bronxville NY
Jeremy Tressler, engineer
Richard Festinger, producer

Hidden Spring recorded October 25, 2023
at Oktaven Studio, Mt. Vernon, NY
Ryan Streber, engineer and producer
Commissioned for the Cygnus ensemble by the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard University

Il était une fois... recorded March 13, 2023
at Futura Productions, Roslindale, Massachusetts
Frank Cunningham, engineer
Richard Festinger, producer
Commissioned by Collage New Music in celebration of Collage's 50th Anniversary Season

Windsongs recorded November 25, 2014
at LeFrak Hall, Queens College, Queens, NY
Da-Hong Seeto, engineer and producer
Commissioned by the San Francisco City Winds

Mastered by Ryan Streber, Oktaven Audio

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