

NEW FOCUS RECORDINGS

The intrepid contemporary vocal ensemble **Ekmeles**, directed by **Jeffrey Gavett**, releases their third recording featuring works written for the ensemble by **George Lewis**, **Wolfgang von Schweinitz**, and **Katherine Balch**. Ekmeles has cultivated an unparalleled reputation for tackling the most challenging vocal scores of our era, navigating microtonality, complex rhythmic textures, and experimental structures with virtuosity and expression.

Track List

1. Wolfgang von Schweinitz: *Plainsound Motet for Ekmeles: "DADA NONO & REJOICE"* 22:18
2. Katherine Balch: *forgetting* 6:43
3. George Lewis: *Lone Coast* 20:57
Iwo Jedynecki, accordion

Ekmeles: Charlotte Mundy, soprano; Elisa Sutherland, mezzo-soprano; Timothy Parsons, countertenor; Tomás Cruz, tenor; Jeffrey Gavett, baritone and director; Steven Hrycelak, bass

Total Time: 49:58

Program Notes

Ekmeles has distinguished itself as one of the elite contemporary vocal music ensembles active today. They have cultivated a specialization in microtonal singing that is truly pushing the boundaries of what is capable in the genre, as evidenced by their performance of Wolfgang von Schweinitz's music on this album, and the music of James Weeks on their previous release (FCR394 *We Live the Opposite Daring*). The ensemble is no less pioneering in their exploration of extended vocal techniques and alternative timbres, and both Katherine Balch's *forgetting* and George Lewis' *Lone Coast* are excellent vehicles for their formidable facility in this direction. Moreover, Ekmeles is playing a major role by curating significant, ambitious compositions for contemporary vocal ensemble, and their indomitable collaborative spirit inspires composers to write at the peak of their capacities. *Nonsongs* is yet another fruit of this labor, a treasure trove of fantastic singing and ensemble musicianship in the service of deep artistry and invention.

Wolfgang von Schweinitz has spent the last three decades cultivating a compositional vocabulary and intonation techniques that facilitate performing complex just intonation intervals. He initially developed this "plainsound music" with works for solo strings, instrumental ensembles, symphony orchestras, and in electronic music contexts, and turned to a cappella vocal music at the invitation of Ekmeles' musical director, Jeffrey Gavett. von Schweinitz's affinity for Renaissance vocal music is apparent throughout, as the music flows through cadential phrases and imitation that evoke that rich

Ekmeles: Nonsongs

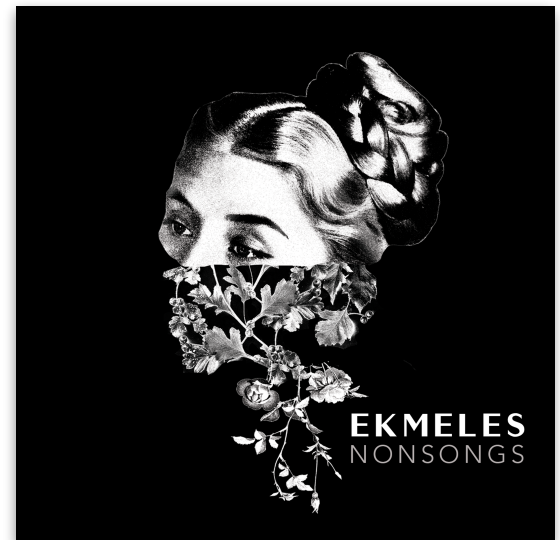
Three new works for the vocal ensemble
Ekmeles by **Wolfgang von Schweinitz**,
Katherine Balch, and **George Lewis**

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Featured Track	Track 1

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repertoire, while navigating the intricate subtleties of pitch that are the core focus of his work. The text is his own, consisting of a sequence of syllables taken from Hebrew, Latin, Spanish, Russian, French, English, and German. The impact of the piece is profound; the ear recognizes characteristic harmonic and melodic motion, but the coloristic inflections that result from the finely tuned just intervals reveal a magical resonance that feels like one is hearing into the future while tethered by echoes of the past, all glued together by elemental acoustic pillars.

Coming after the microscopic focus on pitch in *Plainsound Motet*, the timbral range in Katherine Balch's **forgetting** is striking in its diversity. Scored for vocal ensemble playing ratchets, the percussive clacking is woven into the fabric of the composition, modulating from sporadic interjections to immersive, gentle waterfalls of wooden attacks. The voices intertwine with a rich palette of techniques, both pitched and non-pitched, texted and wordless, to create a sonic environment that oscillates between dry tactility and luminous resonance.

George Lewis' **Lone Coast** is based on a poem by Nathaniel Mackey, *Lone Coast Anacrusis*, and explores the phenomenon of nomadism as an artistic and intellectual state of being. Lewis' language brings a theatricality to this collection, along with an underlying urgency that challenges musical complacency at every turn. Grainy extended vocal techniques merge with liquid glissandi and dense low register voicings to create an unmoored character. Accordionist Iwo Jedynecki joins as the only instrumental guest on the album, with trembling tremolandi, mournful contrapuntal passages, pointillistic interjections, and dark voicings that inhale and exhale in symbiosis with the vocal ensemble. As in the Balch, the members of Ekmeles are given double duty on auxiliary percussion, this time with tolling gongs that contribute to the work's ritualistic hue. *Lone Coast* finishes with an instrumental coda, as the accordionist plays embellished figures in dialogue between their two hands and utters gruff, perfunctory accented chords.

Bio

Ekmeles is a vocal ensemble dedicated to the performance of new and rarely-heard works, and gems of the historical avant garde. They have a special focus on microtonal works, and have been praised for their "extraordinary sense of pitch" by the New York Times. They are the recipients of the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation's 2023 Ensemble Prize, the first American group to receive the honor.

As part of their work expanding the possibilities of tuning and technique in vocal music, Ekmeles has given world premieres by composers including John Luther Adams, Taylor Brook, Courtney Bryan, Ann Cleare, Zosha Di Castri, Erin Gee, Georg Friedrich Haas, Martin Iddon, Hannah Kendall, Catherine Lamb, George Lewis, Wolfgang von Schweinitz, Christopher Trapani, James Weeks, and Arash Yazdani.

In addition to creating their own repertoire, Ekmeles is dedicated to bringing the best of contemporary vocal music to the United States that would otherwise go unheard. They have given US premieres by composers including Joanna Bailie, Carola Bauckholt, Aaron Cassidy, Beat Furrer, Stefano Gervasoni, Georg Friedrich Haas, Evan Johnson, Bernhard Lang, Liza Um, Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Lucia Ronchetti, Wolfgang Rihm, Rebecca Saunders, Salvatore Sciarrino, Mathias Spahlinger, and Agatha Zobel.