



EKMELES
NONSONGS

EKMELES



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 Lim, Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Lucia Ronchetti, Wolfgang Rihm, Rebecca Saunders, Salvatore Sciarrino, Mathias Spahlinger, and Agatha Zobel.

Collaborations with other musical ensembles and artists has been a part of Ekmeles’s work from the very beginning. In their first several seasons they gave the US premieres of Luigi Nono’s *Quando stanno morendo* with AMP New Music, and Beat Furrer’s *FAMA* with Talea Ensemble. Their collaborations with Mivos Quartet include world premieres by Taylor Brook and Evan Johnson, and the US premieres of Stefano Gervasoni’s *Dir - In Dir* and Wolfgang Rihm’s concert-length *ET LUX*. In 2015 Ekmeles joined with members of Tilt Brass and loadbang for the US premiere of Mathias Spahlinger’s monumental *über den frühen tod früuleins anna augusta marggräfin zu baden*, and Wolfgang Rihm’s *SKOTEINÓS*. They returned to the Spahlinger in 2024 on a German tour with composers slide quartet and Ensemble Aventure. Ekmeles also collaborates beyond the traditional concert stage, including the integration of singers into choreographic works by New Chamber Ballet, and a staged memorized performance of David Lang’s *the little match girl passion* at the MET Breuer Museum directed by Tony award winning director Rachel Chavkin. They also gave sold-out performances with Oliver Beer’s *Vessel Orchestra*, the first sound-based installation commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Director Jeffrey Gavett performed at the keyboard of this instrument, composed of 32 resonant hollow objects spanning 7,000 years of the museum’s collection. In 2022 they sang as part of John Luther Adams’s installation work *Veils and Vesper*, broadcast on WNYC’s *New Sounds*.

Ekmeles has taught and premiered works by student composers at Brandeis, Brown, Columbia, University of Florida, Manhattan School of Music, University of New Mexico, NYU, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, Princeton, Rutgers, Stanford, Syracuse, and University of Virginia.

Their second album *We Live the Opposite Daring* was released in February 2024 on New Focus Recordings, with works by Zosha Di Castri, Jeffrey Gavett, Erin Gee, Shawn Jaeger, Hannah

Kendall, and James Weeks. *Textura* praised it saying “this ever-intrepid outfit goes places few other vocal ensembles dare venture.” *Fanfare* calls it “One of the most amazing choral discs to have come my way: a crack vocal ensemble presenting vitally alive music of our time.”

In January of 2020 they released their debut album *A howl*, that was also a prayer on New Focus Recordings, with works by Taylor Brook, Erin Gee, and Christopher Trapani. *Fanfare* magazine said the album’s performances were “beyond expert - almost frightening in their precision.” In the spring of 2020 through May 2021, Ekmeles continued to bring their performances to audiences in authentic ways despite the difficulty of singing together. They performed innovative streaming concerts that combined elements of video art created by members of the ensemble, pre-recorded performances, and live synchronous online performing. Ensemble members performed simultaneously from San Francisco, Philadelphia, and New York.

A versatile and experienced performer – once described as “Glenn Gould of the Accordion” – Iwo Jedynecki is changing the perspective for his instrument with his unique approach to concert presentations and programming. Winner of top prizes at over thirty music competitions, as a soloist and a member of chamber ensembles he has performed in 40 countries across six continents.

His long-standing partnership with violinist Karolina Mikolajczyk has brought the duo to perform in places like Carnegie Hall, Kimmel Center in Philadelphia, Esplanade Concert Hall in Singapore, Melbourne Arts Centre (Australia), Teatro del Lago (Chile).

A 2025 release on Orange Mountain Music showcases premiere recording of the complete Piano Etudes by Philip Glass on classical accordion in Iwo’s arrangement and performance.

Iwo Jedynecki holds a PhD degree in accordion performance and was the first ever accordionist at New York University, as a recipient of the famous Fulbright Scholarship.

Wolfgang Von Schweinitz

Plainsound Motet for Ekmeles: “DADA NONO & REJOICE’

Vocal Counterpoint in 47-limit Just Intonation

for soprano, mezzo-soprano, countertenor, tenor, baritone, and bass
op. 70 (2024)

for the EKMELES Ensemble, New York City:

Charlotte Mundy, Elisa Sutherland, Timothy Parsons,
Tomás Cruz, Jeffrey Gavett, and Steven Hrycelak



When Jeffrey Gavett invited me to write a piece for the EKMELES ensemble a long time ago (I think it was in 2012), I was totally delighted, and I immediately accepted this wonderful offer which gave me the unique opportunity to compose some of my “plainsound music” for this amazing ensemble of singers who have expanded and refined their microtonal singing techniques like perhaps no other group of vocalists on the world. Since 1997, my compositions have been concerned with researching and establishing some efficient new microtonal tuning and ensemble playing techniques based on non-tempered just intonation that can serve to maximize the resonance and “liberate” the partials of the compound sounds by tuning all the musical pitches according to the natural intervals found within the harmonic series of the overtones. After having experimented with various solo strings, instrumental ensembles, the symphony orchestra, and the computer, it seemed like the ultimate challenge for me to try to realize this tonal sonority of just intonation with a purely vocal ensemble. It took me twelve years to get to the point of feeling ready to tackle this task and to find my way into actively cherishing my very old love for the Renaissance vocal music – by developing a strictly functional counterpoint that is conceptually focused on helping the singers in mastering the tuning tasks they are faced with in each moment of their performance.

After sounding the reference pitch of the tonic note A, the ‘Plainsound Motet for Ekmeles’ first introduces the entire gamut of the eight ancient Pythagorean notes B, E, A, D, G, C, F, and B-flat, with the four latter pitches mostly tuned like harmonic ⁹19 (to evoke this touching sound of the 19-limit minor third) before gradually adding the warm major thirds of the 5-limit Renaissance vocal music and the powerful, yet less familiar septimal sounds created by the natural sevenths. In verse 3, the bass commences a slow downward micro-chromatic scale with various quartertone and semitone steps through all the fundamentals that can be tuned by ear below the high A which is sustained by the soprano. This sequence features the peculiar sounds of the 11-limit, 13-, 17-, 19-, 23-limit, and even 37-limit subharmonic regions. In the 2nd stanza the soprano responds with an ascending microtonal scale of pitches tuned to the harmonics ⁹24 to ⁹49 over the subdominant D which is sustained in the bass. This sequence explores the possible harmonization of all the high prime harmonics up to ⁹47, as well as the melodic quality of the many different microtonal steps between the adjacent notes. In the final two sections with stanzas 3 and 4, the microtonal polyphony of 3-, 5-, 7-, and 19-limit pitches is unfolded once again, and the descending bass line with the micro-chromatic scale is continued to complete its overall range of an entire octave. And yes, the music is all about the beauty of melody.

For some reason I could never find enough time and energy during the past twelve years to search and find the best text for the composition of my piece for Ekmeles, and so I ended up writing the libretto myself. It is simply a sequence of phones, all of which are imbued with a meaning in some language, be it Hebrew, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, English, German, or Russian. These syllables are inspired by the ancient Jewish school of thought, regarding Adam and the Lord, this life, the universe, and the coming world. And the phones of the third stanza (“Da Da No No”) are like an echo of the admonishing words once uttered by Jesus of Nazareth during his Sermon on the Mount, as related by Matthew (in chapter 5, verse 37), “But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” – “Simply stay honest and happy!”

- Wolfgang von Schweinitz

Hebrew, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, English, German, and Russian
Phones to be sung with Hebrew or German pronunciation

Hu Ho Hä-a-ä-e-ji 'i 'l
'oj 'oj 'oj 'Oj 'i 'i 'o 'o 'o 'O
ja Hi ja Si je 'Hi 'A-Da-M
a-Hoj a-Hoj ja Hi 'A-Da-M m Hm
ja Hi ja Si je-Hi J-Ja-H W-We-H
'o Ja 'o Ja 'o Ja 'O J-Ja-H W-We-H
'o Ja 'o Ja 'o Ja w-wi schSchö-n

L-La-ä-o-u Da Te Te Te Te
Do-ä - M - mi - N - nu-o - M
L-La-w L-La-w L-La-w Tu J-Ju
J-Ja-H W-We-H 'A-Do-N-Na-J
L-Le 'O-L-La-M M W-Wa 'Ë-De

Da Da N-No N-No
L-Le 'O-L-La-M M Ha-BA'

'o-L-La s-Sa-L-Lü L-La W-Wi
'o-L-La w-Wi schSchö-n Ja Hi
Ha-L-Le-L-LU-J-JA
'A 'O 'A 'O 'A 'O 'A-M-E-N

Katherine Balch
forgetting (2021), for vocal sextet and toy ratchets

Only the song took formidable work to forget.

...

And so it was now hers, the labor of forgetting—.

Forgetting doesn't just happen,
it takes practice. And, like any other practice,
it begins in loathing.

She began to read novels again, which was difficult—
attending to a story, if it faltered,
was an impossible practice.

— excerpt from Katie Ford's *Estrangement* (2020)

"faulty English translation":

Hu Ho Hoy
oj oj Oj -ii – oh oh Oh
yes Here yes Yes – here Are We All
aHoy aHoy – yes Here We Are
yes Here yes Yes You Are – Yes Woe
oh Yes oh Yes oh Yes – Oh Yes Woe
oh Yes oh Yes oh Yes – how Nice

Praise to You You You You
Oh my Lord
Love to You
Yes Woe Oh my Lord
for oh World and Time

"Yes Yes – No No"
for oh World to Come

oh There – Salute to Life
oh There – How Nice Yes Here
God be Praised Yes
Ah Oh Ah Oh Ah Oh – amen

George Lewis
Lone Coast (2023), for vocal sextet and accordion
Commissioned by the Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival

This work, based on the poem Lone Coast Anacrusis, an extended meditation by renowned poet and literary theorist Nathaniel Mackey, deals with nomadism—musical, intellectual, and social. In Mackey's practice of experimental writing, music becomes writing and writing becomes music, and his understanding of music as "quintessential migrancy" animates his portrayal of nomadic human struggle in a dystopic, drowned landscape, a broken world that at first suggests the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Also taking a centered position in the text are the Ohlone, an ancient coastal people of Northern California, from whose name the title words "lone coast" are drawn. The music follows Mackey's lead in exhorting experiencers to, as he puts it, "become aware of unconscious, unintended, and auxiliary meanings, implications and resonances... writing is a mix of saying what I mean to say and finding out what else the writing might say." This attitude to experience, a tactic of survival that we would do well to adopt in our everyday lives, is further exemplified by the music's subliminal discouragement of complacency, its refusal of both solace and retreat, which asks listeners to consider the consequences of being no longer at ease in an increasingly unstable world, one in which new modes of mobile relation seem most relevant to our contemporary situation.

- George Lewis



** Scene 1

Lower Ninth
Bodies
we saw floating
Heads
Endless looking
Endless letting go
Endless turning
to be otherwise

** Scene 2

Woods all around
what seemed a dream
all the buildings were gone.
eating wind,
someone looked at God
eye to eye
blown dust of Bandiagara
We were
where the Alone lived,
purely active

** Scene 3

Came to a clearing
Light so bright
The mountains of the night
Lifetimes behind us now
Wished we were home again
Acorns ground our teeth now
Someone had sung something
No telling when
intent on telling

** Scene 4

Refugees was a word we'd heard,
the nonsong we sang
the song we nonsang
Wept in our sleep,
one with what would never be there again,
where the Alone lived,

** Scene 5

City of sad children
Spiraling away
We were there and somewhere else
No matter where we were
Everywhere more than where we were
clarity conceded
night yet to relent
wrestled with his tongue

** Scene 6

Day of the new dead
New day of the dead
Evacuees
was a word we'd heard
Toulali's croon
enticed us
toyed with us
Ground gone under
where we stood
La Catrina

** Scene 7

We picked our teeth with fishhooks.
The Alone
lay their nets out to dry
nets made of nothingness
the non-thing we not-saw
We were slaves
the indigenous ones
I wanted to break free
but fell as I took a step
World edge, world rebuff
the one coast it all had become
Now crumbling,
circling no end
beginning's beginning's
we stopped and stood looking
at the sunlight streaming in.
Stray nation
sworn allegiance to
Splay state
sung to
seceded from
rescinded as we sang
it all had become now
crumbling world
The Alone

Adapted by George Lewis from the poem Lone Coast Anacrusis by Nathaniel Mackey. Copyright © 2011 by Nathaniel Mackey.

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Charlotte Mundy, soprano

Elisa Sutherland, mezzo soprano

Timothy Parsons, countertenor

Tomás Cruz, tenor

Jeffrey Gavett, baritone and director

Steven Hrycelak, bass

Iwo Jedyncki, accordion

Recording location: Oktaven Audio, Mount Vernon, NY


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Producers: Jeffrey Gavett, Ryan Streber

Engineering, mixing, mastering: Ryan Streber

Editing: Ryan Streber

Art and design: Alex Eckman-Lawn

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1. Wolfgang von Schweinitz - Plainsound Motet for Ekmeles: "DADA NONO & REJOICE" (2024)
 2. Katherine Balch - forgetting (2021)
 3. George Lewis - Lone Coast (2023) ft. Iwo Jedynecki, accordion

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