



BRUCE LEVINGSTON, PIANO

HEAVY SLEEP

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| 06 | BACH | CHROMATIC FANTASY IN D MINOR, BWV 903 7:41 |
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| 08 | BACH-KURTÁG | GOTTES ZEIT IST DIE ALLERBESTE ZEIT, BWV 106 3:07 |
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(A PRAYER IN MEMORY OF GYÖRGY LIGETI) |
| 09 | | I. GOD, FULL OF MERCY 7:02 |
| 10 | | II. I, WHO PLUCK FLOWERS FROM THE HILLTOPS 2:12 |
| 11 | | III. I, WHO BROUGHT CORPSES FROM THE MOUNTAINS 3:05 |
| 12 | | IV. I, WHO USE BUT A TINY PORTION OF THE WORDS
IN THE DICTIONARY 5:10 |
| 13 | | V. I, WHO AM FORCED TO DECIPHER RIDDLES 5:17 |

TOTAL RUNNING TIME: 67:35

PREFACE

NOTES BY BRUCE LEVINGSTON

In choosing to title this album "Heavy Sleep," I sought to reference not only the eponymous opening work on this CD, but also to note the phrase's allusion to death and eternal sleep. For me, each work on this album relates either directly or spiritually to the theme of death, rebirth, or both. Voices of other composers or allusions to their own or others' works are also found throughout these pieces, often appearing as subtle homages to composers of the past: In the Andres work there are echoes of both Bach and Chopin; in the Fairouz, a direct tribute to Ligeti; in the Kurtag, Reger and Siloti arrangements there are reflections on Bach through the art of transcription; and in the original works of Bach himself, particularly in the great B minor Fugue, symbolic voices of man and God. Together, these works offer a touching perspective on the close spiritual connectivity we all share as artists and as human beings, culture to culture, past and present.



HEAVY SLEEP

World Premiere Recording

TIMO ANDRES 1985—

Timo Andres is an acclaimed composer and pianist. The *New Yorker* writes that Andres achieves “an unhurried grandeur that has rarely been felt in American music since John Adams came on the scene.”

Amongst his recent compositions, Andres has composed a piano quintet commissioned and presented by Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam and San Francisco Performances; a solo piano work commissioned by the Gilmore Foundation; and a new string quartet for the Library of Congress. *Heavy Sleep* was composed especially for Bruce Levingston and commissioned by Premiere Commission, Inc.

Collaborative projects include programs with Gabriel Kahane and a world premiere performance of selected Philip Glass *Études* alongside the composer at the Barbican.

Andres earned both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Yale. He has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, BMI, and ASCAP, as well as grants from New Music USA and the Copland Fund.

Timo Andre’s title, *Heavy Sleep*, is derived from the haunting poem ‘Nocturne’ by the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer.

When Timo first sent me his new work, he wrote me saying:

“I tried to give it a kind of Debussy + Bach vibe if such a thing is even possible. The entire thing is based on a contrary-motion chaconne that chromatically modulates each time it happens (I know, super nerdy).”

Maybe nerdy, but also gorgeous! As I played through the work, I definitely got the Bach-Debussy connection, but I also kept feeling there was another voice at play. I had the feeling I was hearing something familiar that I couldn’t quite put my finger on, so to speak! Then Timo sent me a clue and I immediately got it. Here is his own note about the reference:

“For a supposed nocturne, Heavy Sleep is dense, dramatic, and packed with activity. The material of the piece is set on a repeating ground of chromatic scales, an idea taken from the coda of Chopin’s Op. 48 no. 2 nocturne. The piece’s character, though, is based more on Op. 48 no. 1, its measured pacing belying the terrors of its middle section.”

The work is, indeed, a nocturne whose sinewy, seductive spirit stays in the ear long after the gentle progression and exit of its lush closing chords.

CHORALE PRELUDE IN B MINOR, BWV 727 (HERZLICH TUT MICH VERLANGEN)

BACH-REGER

Max Reger was both a superb organist and master composer. He was steeped in the music of both Bach and Brahms and his works show a passion for these composers' masterful polyphony and counterpoint. Reger's transcription of this beautiful chorale prelude highlights the work's tone of longing and prayer by retaining its deep organ pedal notes, yet preserves the exquisite simplicity and power of Bach's original work.

PRELUDE IN B MINOR

BACH-SILOTI

This haunting, elegant transcription is one of the most beloved and effective piano arrangements of Bach's keyboard music. The right and left hand figurations play theme and accompaniment before reversing roles. The original touching figuration of this work may be found in Bach's *Prelude in E minor* from the *Well-Tempered Clavier, Bk.I.*

PRELUDE AND FUGUE IN B MINOR, BWV 869

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH 1685-1750

The *Prelude and Fugue in B minor* is the final work of Bach's masterpiece, the *Well-Tempered Clavier, Bk. I.* Both the *Prelude* and the *Fugue* share subtle motivic elements and combine to make one of Bach's greatest essays in any form. Far from merely a keyboard exercise, the work is a veritable tone poem that contains some of the composer's most intimate expressions about death and rebirth. The *Prelude* is in a binary structure and utilizes a walking bass against a tightly wrought contrapuntal section that continually reaches higher and higher into the upper register, yet is ultimately pulled down by the dramatic and baleful descending bass. The *Fugue* is the longest in the entire first book of the WTC and is also one of its most complex. Its strange, yet mystically beautiful subject is particularly unique in that it contains all twelve pitches of the chromatic scale. Bach fuses compositional and musical symbolism to depict not only the crucifixion, but the Trinity itself. His use of extreme chromaticism, presaging that of Chopin, Wagner and Schonberg, helps weave a tapestry of pain, loss and redemption that has rightly been called "one of the miracles of Baroque music."

6 CHROMATIC FANTASY AND FUGUE IN D MINOR, BWV 903

JOHAN SEBASTIAN BACH

Bach's *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* was composed around 1720. At the time of its creation, it was considered a peak in improvisatory fantasia writing and one of the most daring keyboard works ever written. It was widely copied and played in the composer's own circle. This brilliant work continues to astonish the ear with its brilliant figurations, sweeping use of the keyboard, and mercurial changes of emotion ranging from fiery virtuosity to the deepest pathos. Its prismatic use of color and harmonies fully justifies its "chromatic" appellation.

The *Fantasy* consists of three main sections: the first, a gripping, improvisatory-like prelude, the second a plaintive recitative containing several explosive outbursts of emotion, and the third, a brilliant mixture of the two. Bach gives a great deal of freedom regarding the interpretation of various figurations, particularly in the broken chords and arpeggios in the *Fantasy*. This is a test of both the performer's taste and musical sensibility and offers the opportunity for each interpreter to bring unique insight and artistry to the work.

The subject of the *Fugue* begins on the musical letters of Bach's name and is developed, with an unusually grand-scale plan, into an exquisite tapestry of contrapuntal writing that displays the composer's total mastery of structure and polyphony. The work closes with a final return of the subject and countersubject that brings this Baroque masterpiece to its majestic conclusion.

GOTTES ZEIT IST DIE ALLERBESTE ZEIT BWV 106 (ACTUS TRAGICUS)

GYÖRGY KURTÁG 1926–

Gottes Zeit ist die allerbest Zeit (God's time is the very best time) is the opening of one of Bach's finest cantatas and was written to be played at a service for the dead. Its tender, sighing voices and wistful air represent some of Bach's most inspired music.

Kurtág originally arranged this work for four hands. The two-hand arrangement heard in this recording is a transcription of Kurtág's four-hand version made by Bruce Levingston.

When asked if he believes in God, Kurtág replied:

I do not know. I toy with the idea. Consciously, I am certainly an atheist, but I do not say it out loud, because if I look at Bach, I cannot be an atheist. Then I have to accept the way he believed. And how can I get closer to him from the outside? I do not believe in the Gospels in a literal fashion, but a Bach fugue has the crucifixion in it—as the nails are being driven in. In music I am always looking for the hammering of nails.... This is a dual vision. My brain rejects it all. But my brain isn't worth much.



9 EL MALE RACHAMIM

(A PRAYER IN MEMORY OF GYÖRGY LIGETI) *World Premiere Recording*

MOHAMMED FAIROUZ 1985-

Mohammed Fairouz, born in 1985, is a composer who has been frequently commissioned and recorded. The *New York Times* declared him “an important new artistic voice” and *BBC World News* called him “one of the most talented composers of his generation.” Fairouz integrates Middle-Eastern modes into Western structures, to deeply expressive effect. His large-scale works, including four symphonies and an opera, engage major geopolitical and philosophical themes with persuasive craft and a marked seriousness of purpose. Anthony Tommasini of *The New York Times* called his debut opera *Sumeida’s Song* “intensely dramatic [with] a searing score... The Arabic elements of his style – microtonal modes, spiraling dance rhythms, plaintive melodic writing – give fresh, distinctive jolts to the Western elements.”

Fairouz’s catalog encompasses virtually every genre, including opera, symphonies, ensemble works, chamber and solo pieces, choral settings, and electronic music. Mohammed Fairouz was chosen by the BBC to be a featured artist for the television series *Collaboration Culture*, which aired globally on BBC World Service TV. His principal teachers included György Ligeti, Gunther Schuller, and Richard Danielpour.

El Male Rachamim is a touching tribute to Ligeti, from one of his last pupils. Fairouz notes: “*El Male*

Rachamim (God, full of mercy) takes its title from both the poem by Yehuda Amichai and the litany that inspired it. The Jewish funeral prayer recited by the hazzan accompanies the ascension of the soul and is used to evoke the memory of the deceased. It’s cast in five sections that flow continuously with little pause.”

In the first movement, the original prayer is invoked and then strikingly upended: “God full of mercy/If only God were not full of mercy/There would be mercy in the world and not just in him.” The music is uncompromisingly dark, pleading and wrenching.

The tension is released with the lyrical but bittersweet second movement called “I, who pluck flowers from the hilltops”; this movement conceals, in the composer’s words, “an inner crying.”

The composer describes the third movement, “I, who brought corpses from the hilltops,” as “a full-on dance of death.” Like the Bach-Siloti Prelude, its figurations in both hands play equally important roles to create a canvas of breathless, unrelenting drive and emotion.

A plaintive, single voice is heard in the heartrending fourth movement, “I who use but a tiny portion of words in the dictionary.” The power as well as fragility of this isolated voice is both arresting and poignant; it ultimately gives way to the explosive entrance of the finale. In this movement, “I, who am forced to decipher riddles”, the music continually seeks to find resolution, yet is forbidden the completion of its journey; finally, with a lyrical transformation of transcendent beauty, an echo of the opening returns in both exultation of life and a final exhalation of the spirit.

A silhouette of a man in a suit, identified as Bruce Levingston, is shown in profile against a sunset sky. The background features a city skyline with a prominent tower on the right. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

BRUCE LEVINGSTON

Bruce Levingston is a leading figure in the world of contemporary music. *The New Yorker* has called him “a force for new music.” Many of the country’s most important composers have written works for him and his Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center world premiere performances of their works have won notable acclaim. *The New York Times* calls him “one of today’s most adventurous musicians” describing his playing as “graceful,” “dreamy,” and “hauntingly serene.” Recently, *The Boston Globe* praised his “commanding performance” and the *Washington Post* commended his “wonderfully even touch, transparency, and timeless reverie, which Mr. Levingston projected beautifully.”

Mr. Levingston’s recordings have also received critical acclaim. *The American Record Guide* wrote: “Levingston is a pianist’s pianist... stunning and highly illuminating performances.” *Classics Today* celebrated his CD *Portraits* for its “transcendent virtuosity and huge arsenal of tone color.” *Lucid Culture* reported: “*Still Sound* is a gorgeously conceptual album...

a knockout... a quietly powerful reminder of why Levingston has become the go-to pianist for many of this era’s most intriguing composers. *Still Sound* was named “Record of the Month” by *MusicWeb International* which called his playing “sublime.”

Mr. Levingston has appeared in concerts and music festivals throughout the world and his performances have been broadcast on radio, internet, and television. Noted for his creative programming, he has collaborated with some of the most gifted artists of our time, including composers Philip Glass and Lisa Bielawa, painter Chuck Close; actor Ethan Hawke; authors Michael Cunningham, Nick McDonell, and George Plimpton; violinist Colin Jacobsen; cellist Eric Jacobsen, the Brooklyn Rider; dancers Tyler Angle, Herman Cornejo and Alessandra Ferri, and choreographer Jorma Elo.

Mr. Levingston is the founder and artistic director of Premiere Commission, Inc., a nonprofit foundation that has commissioned and premiered over 50 new works.

HEAVY SLEEP

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EDITING: Dan Merceruio
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