



AMERICAN SONATAS

FROM TWO MILLENNIA

WONKI LEE ALTO SAXOPHONE

ER-HSUAN LI PIANO

CLARINET &
SAXOPHONE
CLASSICS
RECORDINGS

FORWARD

WONKI LEE

When I began to envision a new recording project, I was compelled to record David Maslanka's Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano. I have never had a chance to meet the composer personally, yet there are some parallels in our lives between David Maslanka and myself.


David Maslanka and his family lived in Inwood, the northernmost neighborhood of Manhattan where many artists lived before relocating to Missoula Montana. His life in New York with three young children was anything but challenging physically, mentally, and spiritually. There was a long commute from Inwood to Brooklyn where he held a teaching position, there was no time for creativity to compose, and there was financial pressure as a father of three children living in New York. Maslanka suffered from depression and finally came out of it to start a new life in Montana in 1989 until his passing on **August 6**, 2017. The Sonata was the last work he composed during his time in New York.

I was born on **August 6**, 1989, in Tokyo Japan, and moved to New York City in 2005 to pursue my musical studies at the Manhattan School of Music (MSM) and Professional Children's School. During my doctoral studies at MSM, my wife and I moved to Inwood where my first daughter was born. Inwood was affordable, quiet, spacious, and surrounded by nature such as Inwood Hill Park and the Hudson River. That is probably why many musicians and artists resided in Inwood away from the ecstasy of New York City. Life in New York was challenging and stressful. Long commutes in traffic, less time to practice and produce creative work, and no time to spend with family were slowly eroding my soul as an artist. It was during this time that I found an opening for a saxophone professor position at Montana State University. Frankly, I had no idea where Montana was and knew no one in the area, but the only thing that came to my mind was the music of David Maslanka. Eventually, I was offered the position, and my wife and I decided to move to Bozeman Montana with our two daughters (3 years old and 6-month-old). Although the first year was challenging for

my family to adjust to the new environment, slowly we felt a sense of healing through the breathtaking beauty of the scenery, no time wasted in traffic and commute, and more time spent as a family. I regained my time and energy to create new projects, and I felt a deep desire to work on David Maslanka's music. As I met people who personally knew him, visited his house in Missoula, and lived in this beautiful part of the world, I feel wholeheartedly that I understand David Maslanka because of the unique parallels in life that I share with the composer. This was why I created this album along with two great sonatas by William Albright and Robert Muczynski.

Similar to Masato Kumoi's impression of the sonata, the music evokes the journey into the snow trail in Montana during its harsh winter. However, the sonata was composed in New York, and the music was influenced by the monotony of daily life, the lunacy of the city, a paradox of loneliness in modern cities, and trembling NYC subways. As I interpret the sonata, I cannot help but hear another parallel between New York and Montana. When I perform the sonata, at certain times I find myself in the middle of a winter trail in Montana, and at other times I'm standing inside the NYC subway. Perhaps, David Maslanka foresaw his near future in his meditative world of unconsciousness. Whatever the "authentic interpretation" may be, the music is deeply personal, and there is a place inside of us where only the music of David Maslanka can take us. With the new edition completed by Matthew Maslanka, we gained new perspectives on the sonata. As I was studying the score, I did my best to pay careful attention to all the details conceived by the composer and beautifully engraved by Matthew Maslanka. This is the first recording of the new edition, and I hope I did justice to serve their creation faithfully. (December 25, 2024)





MATTHEW MASLANKA

FORWARD

My father's *Sonata for Alto Saxophone* has been a constant presence in my life. From the time I was a small child, listening to him compose it, through my teenage years, dubbing cassette tapes of it, to finally publishing the music as an adult, this work has always held deep meaning for me. Its blend of sweet, simple melody with violent, emotional outbursts is striking. Like all of his pieces, the Sonata is a snapshot of a moment in his life, capturing the experience of being on the cusp of something new, a period of significant transformation. It reflects the turbulence of a major turning point.

In 1988, my father had just emerged from severe depression and was beginning to see the next steps in his life, though he still felt trapped. The Sonata was one of the last pieces he wrote before our family moved from New York City to Missoula, Montana. In it, you can hear the tension of unresolved struggles. Once he reached Montana, his music shifted dramatically toward a more spacious, patient style.

For me, 2023 and 2024 were similarly pivotal. I confronted and came to terms with deep spiritual and physical challenges that had been with me for much of my life. As I prepared for serious heart surgery in the spring of 2024, the Sonata took on a new meaning. When I began publishing my father's music through Maslanka Press in 2012, creating a new edition of the Sonata was one of my earliest goals. Over the years, I made a few attempts at it but never felt ready. As I faced the possibility that this might be my last contribution to the world, the project gained new urgency. I dedicated the months leading up to my surgery to completing the edition and presenting it at the 2024 NASA conference.

I'm happy to say I came through that ordeal and am now building a life grounded in new self-awareness. The Sonata, for me, symbolizes Transition—with a capital T. It takes the performer and listener from a place of uneasy calm, through wrenching anger and despair, to a brief moment of triumph, only to end on a note of uncertainty. It leaves you questioning whether the storm has truly passed, or if it's only a pause. The storm may never fully be over, but each time we face it, we gain more tools to confront whatever comes next.



SONATA FOR ALTO SAXOPHONE AND PIANO

DAVID MASLANKA (1989)

My Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano is in three movements (Moderate, Slow, Fast), a formal plan which I tend to favor. This formal scheme represents one of my ongoing compositional characters. My way of composing, which is essentially tonal, thematic, and developmental, has pushed me toward this personal adaptation of the old sonata form.

The opening movement of the Sonata has three themes – two very similar ones, both in A minor, and one in C major. The development takes up elements of the first theme. The recapitulation is of the third theme only, and the coda recalls theme two. The attitude of the movement is reflective, with sudden eruptions of boiling energy. The second movement is a broad soliloquy with an opening that has the feel of an accompanied recitative. The second section is an intricate evolution of theme one from the first movement, and the third section is a shortened restatement of the opening. I feel a strong influence in the movement of the harmonies and expressive quality of certain madrigals by Gesualdo. The third movement owes a tip of the hat to Allan Pettersson's Symphony No.12: *The Dead in the Marketplace* (after the poem by Pablo Neruda). I was riveted by the fierce energy of Pettersson's music and its insistence on C minor over great stretches of time. My third movement is a huge rondo form – A B A C A and *coda*. The opening section is crunching, flying C minor music. The second section is mournful and the third is a playful C major variation of the opening material. The recapitulation is literal until it releases rather suddenly into an ethereal coda. This movement evokes a feeling of struggle and ultimate resignation. (David Maslanka, November 1988).

SONATA FOR ALTO SAXOPHONE AND PIANO, OP. 29

ROBERT MUCZYNSKI (1970)

Robert Muczynski, American composer, pianist, and teacher, was born in Chicago in 1929. He studied piano with Walter Knupfer and composition with Alexander Tcherepnin at DePaul University, receiving a Bachelor of Music degree and a Master of Music degree in piano performance. In 1965, he joined the faculty of the University of Arizona in Tucson as Professor of Piano and head of the composition department. In 1988, Muczynski retired as Professor Emeritus.

The Sonata Op. 29 for Alto Saxophone and Piano was commissioned by saxophonist Trent Kynaston, written in 1970, and published by G. Schirmer. Muczynski considered giving it the title of Desert Sketches or Desert Serenade. Kynaston said: *"I suggested that the mindset of the classical saxophonist at that time was such that, if he used one of those titles, many players might not consider it a "serious" piece and overlook it. I suggested he call it Sonata, even though it had only two movements. After it had been out for several years, he said he was glad we made that decision, but now when I play it, I have these visions of that desert scene, and I wish we had followed his original thought."*

Muczynski and Kynaston performed the premiere of the Sonata in December 1970 at the University of Arizona.



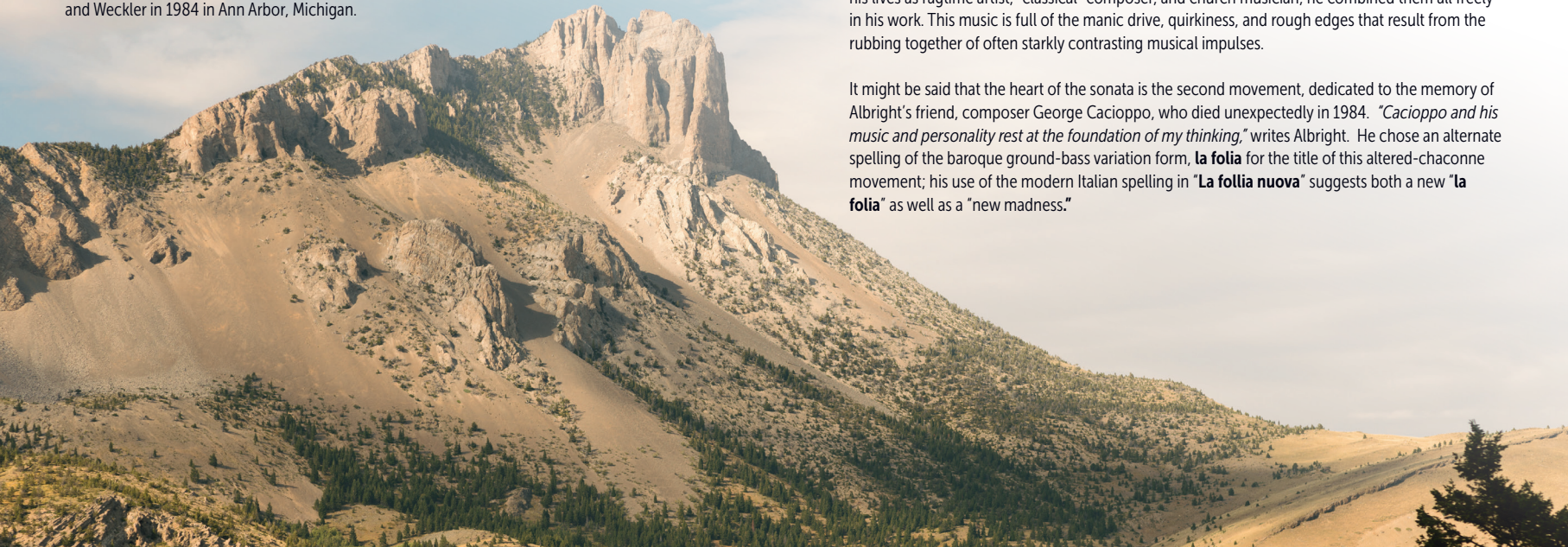
SONATA FOR ALTO SAXOPHONE AND PIANO

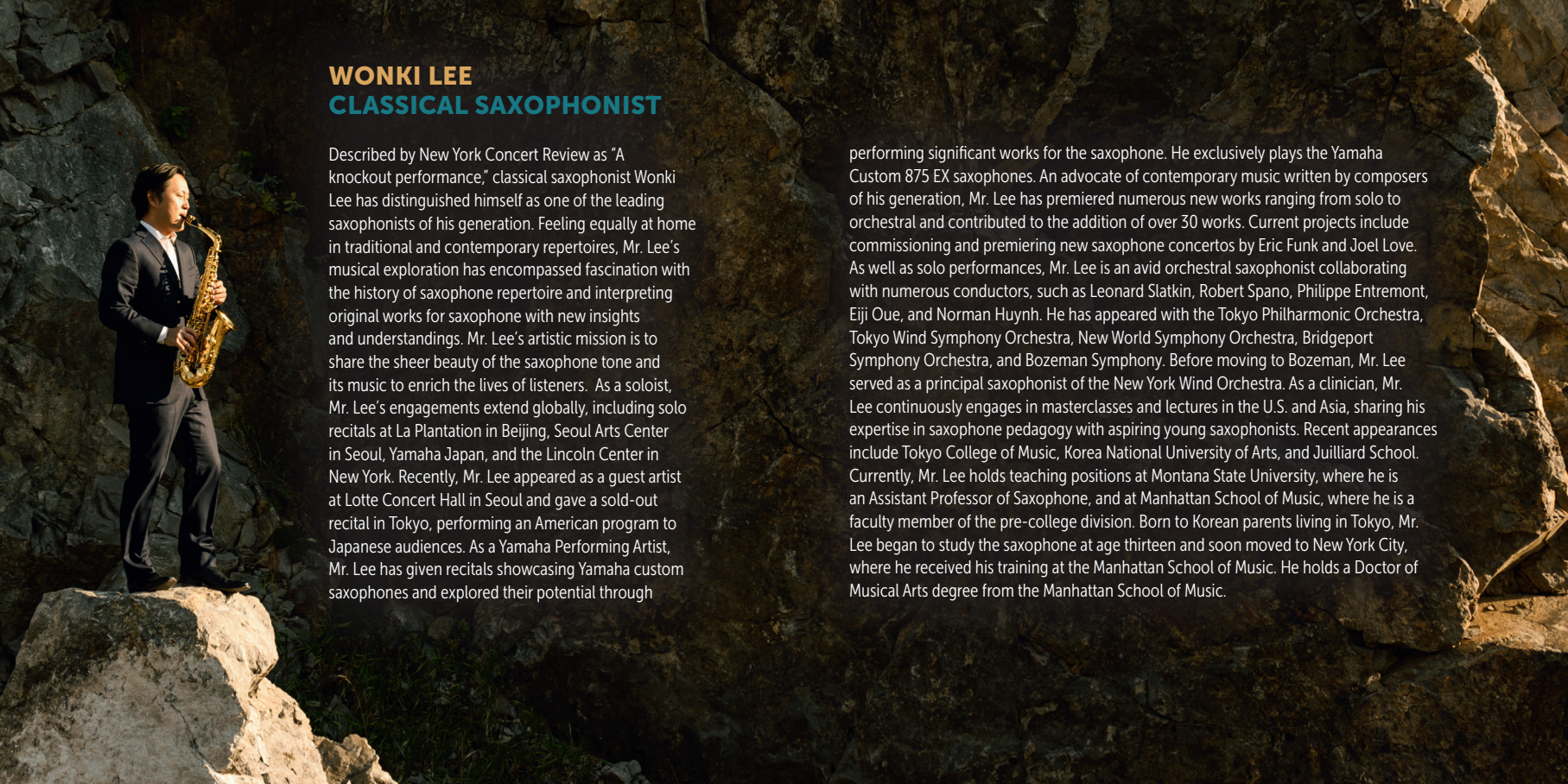
WILLIAM ALBRIGHT (1984)

William Albright's Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano has become a cornerstone of the saxophone repertoire. The Sonata was composed under a National Endowment for the Arts and was written for a group of three saxophonist-piano duos: Laura Hunter and Brian Connelly, Donald Sinta and Ellen Weckler, and Joseph Wytko and Walter Cosand. The Sonata was premiered by Sinta and Weckler in 1984 in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

William Albright was born in Gary, Indiana in 1944. Known primarily as a composer and organist, Albright studied at the University of Michigan and the Paris Conservatory under composers such as Olivier Messiaen, George Rochberg, and Ross Lee Finney. He brought renewed interest in ragtime and stride piano pieces of the early 1900's. Albright uses eclectic styles and concepts, combining "complex rhythmic and atonal styles with elements of American popular and non-Western music. Throughout his career, Albright was a pioneer in streaming together styles and genres that composers had kept strictly separate during the last days of high modernism; instead of partitioning his lives as ragtime artist, "classical" composer, and church musician, he combined them all freely in his work. This music is full of the manic drive, quirkiness, and rough edges that result from the rubbing together of often starkly contrasting musical impulses.

It might be said that the heart of the sonata is the second movement, dedicated to the memory of Albright's friend, composer George Cacioppo, who died unexpectedly in 1984. *"Cacioppo and his music and personality rest at the foundation of my thinking,"* writes Albright. He chose an alternate spelling of the baroque ground-bass variation form, **la folia** for the title of this altered-chaconne movement; his use of the modern Italian spelling in **"La follia nuova"** suggests both a new **"la folia"** as well as a "new madness."



A man in a dark suit is standing on a large, light-colored rock formation, playing a saxophone. The background is a dark, textured rock wall. The lighting is dramatic, with the man and the rock he stands on being illuminated from the side, creating strong highlights and shadows.

WONKI LEE

CLASSICAL SAXOPHONIST

Described by New York Concert Review as “A knockout performance,” classical saxophonist Wonki Lee has distinguished himself as one of the leading saxophonists of his generation. Feeling equally at home in traditional and contemporary repertoires, Mr. Lee’s musical exploration has encompassed fascination with the history of saxophone repertoire and interpreting original works for saxophone with new insights and understandings. Mr. Lee’s artistic mission is to share the sheer beauty of the saxophone tone and its music to enrich the lives of listeners. As a soloist, Mr. Lee’s engagements extend globally, including solo recitals at La Plantation in Beijing, Seoul Arts Center in Seoul, Yamaha Japan, and the Lincoln Center in New York. Recently, Mr. Lee appeared as a guest artist at Lotte Concert Hall in Seoul and gave a sold-out recital in Tokyo, performing an American program to Japanese audiences. As a Yamaha Performing Artist, Mr. Lee has given recitals showcasing Yamaha custom saxophones and explored their potential through

performing significant works for the saxophone. He exclusively plays the Yamaha Custom 875 EX saxophones. An advocate of contemporary music written by composers of his generation, Mr. Lee has premiered numerous new works ranging from solo to orchestral and contributed to the addition of over 30 works. Current projects include commissioning and premiering new saxophone concertos by Eric Funk and Joel Love. As well as solo performances, Mr. Lee is an avid orchestral saxophonist collaborating with numerous conductors, such as Leonard Slatkin, Robert Spano, Philippe Entremont, Eiji Oue, and Norman Huynh. He has appeared with the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, Tokyo Wind Symphony Orchestra, New World Symphony Orchestra, Bridgeport Symphony Orchestra, and Bozeman Symphony. Before moving to Bozeman, Mr. Lee served as a principal saxophonist of the New York Wind Orchestra. As a clinician, Mr. Lee continuously engages in masterclasses and lectures in the U.S. and Asia, sharing his expertise in saxophone pedagogy with aspiring young saxophonists. Recent appearances include Tokyo College of Music, Korea National University of Arts, and Juilliard School. Currently, Mr. Lee holds teaching positions at Montana State University, where he is an Assistant Professor of Saxophone, and at Manhattan School of Music, where he is a faculty member of the pre-college division. Born to Korean parents living in Tokyo, Mr. Lee began to study the saxophone at age thirteen and soon moved to New York City, where he received his training at the Manhattan School of Music. He holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Manhattan School of Music.

ER-HSUAN LI PIANIST

Praised by the New York Concert Review as having “played with astonishing maturity and flair,” Dr. Er-Hsuan Li is a highly accomplished pianist. A native of Taiwan, Li has performed across Europe, Asia, and the United States on the stages of renowned venues including Carnegie Hall, Harris Theater in Chicago, Mozarteum in Salzburg, and the Taiwan National Concert Hall. He attained a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in piano performance at the University of Colorado Boulder, a Master of Music degree from Northwestern University, and a Bachelor of Music degree from the Manhattan School of Music. He currently serves as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Music at Pacific Lutheran University. In recent years, Li has taught several masterclasses including at Montana State University, and the Festival de Perfeccionamiento Pianístico in Xalapa, Mexico. Li is an esteemed saxophone accompaniment specialist, who has performed in multiple faculty and guest recitals, including Montana State University, Tennessee State University, Austin Peay State University, Oklahoma Baptist University, and Oklahoma Christian University. He has also presented and performed at the biennial conference of the North American Saxophone Alliance at the University of Southern Mississippi and at Oklahoma State University. Li specializes in contemporary music and has premiered numerous new works as a soloist, collaborative pianist, and ensemble keyboardist. His most notable experiences include working on Boulez’s *Douze Notations* with Pierre-Laurent Aimard, performing Steve Reich’s *City Life*, *Tehillim*, and *Clapping Music*, alongside Reich himself, and receiving coaching from Chinese Canadian composer Alexina Louie on her well-known work - *Scenes From A Jade Terrace*. This season, Li’s professional engagements will bring him to Xalapa, Mexico as faculty for the Séptimo Festival de Perfeccionamiento Pianístico for the third consecutive year, serve as a competition staff collaborative pianist for the International Horn Competition of America, present a lecture at the annual conference of Colorado State Music Teachers Association at Colorado State University-Pueblo, and will professionally record John Clay Allen’s Piano Concerto “The Stone Harp” with Boulder Symphony under the baton of maestro Devin Hughes.

JEREMIAH SLOVARP RECORDING/EDITING/MIXING ENGINEER

Jeremiah Slovarp began his career as a location sound engineer on films and commercials. In 2002 he started Jereco Studios Inc., designing his first commercial recording facility in Bozeman, Montana where he leads the company and its staff on a wide variety of studio, event production, and AV integration projects to this day. Today, Jeremiah is responsible for producing and engineering ADR and Post Production Sound, Live Sound, Music Recording, and Location Sound for shows and events both nationally and regionally. In 2010, Jeremiah was appointed the Audio Director of the 11th & Grant with Eric Funk music television series on Montana PBS. By 2011, Jeremiah earned his first Emmy Award for Audio for his work on the 11th & Grant TV series. Jeremiah has earned a total of eleven Emmy Awards. A graduate of Montana State University – Bozeman, Jeremiah continues supporting, working, and teaching at the institution. Jeremiah is faculty. He teaches Entertainment Business, Sound for Film & TV, Multimedia Audio Production, Recording 2. He also teaches an interdisciplinary class with rotating topics by semester that include Video Game Sound, Live Sound, Lighting, and Event Production. Jeremiah is the elected Trustee for NATAS-NW chapter and serves on the Board of Governors. He is the Technical Director for the Warren Miller Performing Arts Center in Big Sky, MT. Jeremiah is an active member of the Audio Engineering Society [AES] and the Recording Academy [Grammy Awards]. Jeremiah enjoys skiing wherever there is fresh powder, trout fishing in his childhood backyard of the West Boulder River, driving big trucks, and listening to music of all kinds.

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Recorded in September 26-28, 2024, at Reynolds Recital Hall, Bozeman, Montana USA
Equipment: Yamaha Custom Saxophone YAS-875GP / Selmer S90-180 / D’addario Reserve Reeds 3.0+ / Ishimori Woodstone GP Ligature / Breathtaking Saxophone Strap

DAVID MASLANKA (1943-2017)

Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano (1988)

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|-------------------|-------|
| 1. I. Moderato | 8.43 |
| 2. II. Slow | 11.08 |
| 3. III. Very Fast | 13.39 |

ROBERT MUCZYNSKI (1929-2010)

Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano Op. 29 (1970)

- | | |
|-------------------------|------|
| 4. I. Andante Maestoso | 4.08 |
| 5. II. Allegro Energico | 3.01 |

WILLIAM ALBRIGHT (1944-1998)

Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano (1984)

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|--|------|
| 6. I. Two-Part Invention | 4.48 |
| 7. II. La follia nuova: a lament for George Cacioppo | 9.36 |
| 8. III. Scherzo "Will o' the wisp" | 1.52 |
| 9. IV. Recitative and Dance | 4.15 |

Total time 1:01:15

