
ELIZA GARTH

Pianist Eliza Garth has achieved international distinction through her recordings and through concert appearances in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. A graduate of the Juilliard School, she has championed some of the most demanding works in the repertoire, including that of the present day. The New York Times has stated, “Ms. Garth ... has an exquisite ear for piano sound. One can think of no one better qualified to play this intricate, shining music.”

Her notable premieres include works by Oliver Knussen, Sheree Clement, George Benjamin, Perry Goldstein, Jeffrey Mumford, David Froom, Scott Wheeler, Nomi Epstein, and, in 2023, the New York premiere of Judith Weir’s Piano Concerto.

Her recordings of the complete piano works of Donald Martino on the Centaur label received national acclaim. The first of these was included in a New York Times survey of its own music critics’ favorite recordings of music written since 1945. The Maryland State Arts Council has recognized her twice

with the Individual Artist Award.

Though Ms. Garth is best known for her dedication to contemporary music, her work as a performer and concert curator is notable for its versatility and range of musical interests. Inspired by her experiences as an accompanist for the Pro Musicis Foundation in her early professional life – which took her to venues as varied as Rikers Island Prison in New York City and the Opera Comique in Paris – Ms. Garth co-founded Music from Poplar Hill, an innovative concert series hosted by historic St. George’s Episcopal Church in Valley Lee, Maryland. The series was started in order to bring acclaimed artists to Southern Maryland to perform for underserved audiences and to offer high-quality educational programming to children and youth.

Ms. Garth is the Executive Producer of the 2025 film *Shall We Gather*, a study of race and reconciliation between two historic churches in St. Mary’s County, Maryland, directed Naeem Cobb.

She resides in New York.

By the River

ELIZA GARTH | WORKS FOR PIANO SOLO

- 1 David Froom: Variations on an Early American Hymn Tune (2019) 7:52
 - 2 Scott Wheeler: Beach Spring (2022) 10:38
 - 3 Sheree Clement: Teeth (2021) spoken part: Eliza Garth 10:19
- Johannes Brahms: Six Chorale Preludes, Op. 122 (1896) TT 18:40
Transcription for piano by Ferruccio Busoni
- 4 Herzlich tut mich erfreuen (My heart is filled) 2:47
 - 5 Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele (Deck yourself, O dear soul) 3:10
 - 6 Er is ein Ros’ entsprungen (A rose breaks into bloom) 2:56
 - 7 Herzlich tut mich verlangen (My inmost heart is yearning) 2:56
 - 8 Herzlich tut mich verlangen (second setting) 3:27
 - 9 O Welt, ich muß dich lassen (O World, I must leave you) 3:25
 - 10 Frederick Tillis: Spiritual Fantasy No. 4 (1981) 12:33

Total running time 1:00:04

Produced by Judith Sherman. Engineered by Charles Mueller. Edited, mixed and mastered by Judith Sherman and Jeanne Vélonis. Recorded at Oktaven Audio, Mount Vernon, NY.

Tracks 1-2, 4-10 recorded August 20, 28 and 29, 2024. Session and editing assistant: Jeanne Vélonis. Track 3 recorded August 5, 2023. First recording of the Froom, Wheeler and Clement works. Photography: Tatiana Daubek.



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ELIZA GARTH

Works for piano solo

By the River

Music is a river fed by many streams. Try as one might to capture it and attach tidy labels – classical in this bottle, jazz in that, minimalism in the other – the river flows on, enriched by each tributary as it goes.

The works in this album - strikingly diverse in expression, scope, form and technical demands - share a common trait: each carries a melody that was first sung in a church, found its way into the consciousness of a composer, and travelled on to the concert hall. The composer may have been influenced by religious faith, like Johannes Brahms, or simply intrigued by a melody that happened to originate in a hymnal. Anyone, devout or not, who has heard *Appalachian Spring* (composed by a non-observant Jew) knows the power of a well-conceived hymn tune; long after the performance is over, the Shaker melody “Simple Gifts” lingers in the ear. The same can be said of the hymn tunes that inspired the works in this collection.

David Froom (1951-2022) was born in California and spent most of his career on the east coast, creating a substantial body of instrumental and vocal music that has been widely performed, recorded, and recognized by the Guggenheim Foundation, the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award, and many others. His *Variations on an Early American Hymn Tune* begins with the barest statement of the hymn tune “Holy Manna,” moving into a dance-like passage but quickly morphing into a series of thoughtful, mysterious and emotionally varied sections, often with the hymn poking out of the top and the bottom of Froom’s complex and luscious textures. The depth of the central quiet section is answered by a solemn coda, a transformed return to the hymn tune that seems to reach out to infinity. This compact work punches above its weight and could serve as an introduction to the world of this profound musical mind, heard here in a performance by the musician who knew him best.

Scott Wheeler (b. 1952) was born in Washington, D.C. and spent many years in

Boston as a composer, conductor, pianist, and co-founder of the Dinosaur Annex Ensemble. He has composed in a wide range of genres, including operas commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera, Washington National Opera, and the Guggenheim Foundation. Eliza Garth commissioned Wheeler’s *Beach Spring* and suggested the melody; she performed the premiere at Bargemusic in Brooklyn, NY. The work is an expansive set of variations on this beautiful hymn tune. Wheeler had her playing in mind as he composed *Beach Spring* (Ms. Garth premiered his 2006 piano concerto *Gradualia*), conceiving the work as an exploration of the many colors and emotions, from playful to rapturous, that might be drawn from the luminous melody. The ending of the piece connects the American hymn tune tradition to the gospel piano styles of Keith Jarrett, Charles Ives and Frederick Rzewski.

The work of **Sheree Clement** (b. 1955) has been recognized with a Guggenheim Fellowship and has been performed at the Miller Theatre, the Tanglewood Music

Center, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, and the Temple du Luxembourg in Paris, among many other prominent venues. While much of her work leans into comedy, *Teeth* looks at tragedy, with a maximized sound color and sensory palate, the solo piano played inside and out (including bowing), and six channels of fixed media and spoken word. The pianist is ‘in character’.

It is the year 2020. A pianist, Doris, works as a church music director and piano teacher, but the Covid-19 pandemic has thrust her into severe isolation. Home alone, listening to ambulance sirens whizzing toward the hospital where her own mother just died of Covid, she plays her piano and tries to manage her terror and outrage, starting with the cynical proverb, “Teeth in a hyena’s face always slide into place.” She mutters, hums and plays, the sounds in her memory filling the room: the hymn *Open My Eyes*, snippets of old music, voices, memories of her ancestors’ stories about endemic hookworm, and her mother’s voice in her last days.

Eliza Garth commissioned *Teeth* and performed the premiere at Merkin Hall, New York City. She and Ms. Clement enjoy a long-term collaboration.

In 1896, grieving Clara Schumann’s death and facing his own, **Johannes Brahms** (1833-1897) turned to Lutheran hymnody to compose his final work, Eleven Chorale Preludes for organ, Op. 122. A reading of the texts reveals that these hymns are not expressions of despair, but rather hopeful, even joyous anticipation of a life beyond the earthly. A lifetime of compositional wisdom culminates in these short works, composed at the dawn of the 20th century and rooted in the time of Bach and before. In 1902, shortly after Brahms’ Chorale Preludes were published, **Ferruccio Busoni** adapted six of them for the piano - the ones he thought to be best suited to the instrument – and all of these are presented in this collection.

Rev. Irwin Beverly, pastor of the historically Black Bethesda Methodist Church in rural Southern Maryland, once said, “Do you know the meaning of *Nobody Knows*

the Trouble I’ve Seen? I can tell you: Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen because I’m not allowed to talk about it.” This early spiritual forms the basis of the majestic Spiritual Fantasy #4 for piano by **Frederick Tillis** (1930-2020), in which Tillis “talks about it” in a *cri de coeur*. Other spirituals appear as well, including *Jacob’s Ladder*. It is one of a series of works Tillis composed bearing that title, each for a different instrumentation.

Dr. Tillis’ distinguished career in the mid-20th century encompassed a rich array of influences and achievements. He served on the faculty at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where the concert hall bears his name. Tillis was a published poet and noted jazz saxophonist with classical training, and elements of jazz found their way into his more classically conceived compositions. Influences of Bach and 20th century masters can also be found there, undergirding his own highly original style.

For David.