



# UNRAVELING

TIM FAIN



## A WORD BY TIM FAIN

This album has been a long time in the making. The initial spark for my work, *Unraveling*, and the album as a whole, came from a feeling in late 2020 of instability, a suspicion that things were changing and coming apart faster than I could comprehend, and a keen awareness of just how fragile and transient everything is. Some of this feeling may just have been a result of growing older; but in the midst of the COVID pandemic, together with other crises such as increasing world political and financial instability, climate change, and an alarming increase in mental illness among young people, I struggled to imagine a positive future.

At its worst, this sort of realization about the tenuous stability of our world could have brought about a feeling of nihilism, but rather, I deeply wanted it to be a catalyst for gratitude and appreciation, a call to action to take care of and love our world and the other beings within it even more.

*Unraveling* is an attempt to understand this balance, a way forward that accepts things as they are but also embraces our great capacity in every moment, and in any situation, for positive change. It is a journey toward a true and meaningful sense of agency and hope in

our lives. From John Corigliano's disintegration of American fiddle technique in his work *STOMP*, to Bryce Dessner's violin-meets-synthesizer driving kineticism in *Ornament and Crime*, to Esa-Pekka Salonen's dystopian musical exploration of a world without laughter in *Lachen Verlernt*, and Philip Glass' strikingly intimate ode to silence and isolation in *Evening Song No. 3*, bookended by Meredith Monk's hypnotic *Return to Earth*, and my own work *Unraveling*—this recording is a testament to moments of transcendence and meaning which have emerged amidst these volatile and uncertain times.

## UNRAVELING (2021)

VIOLIN, PRE-RECORDED TRACK, ELECTRONICS

I wrote *Unraveling* to be performed by one player through the use of looped and pre-recorded music. I wanted to express at the time my feeling of isolation and longing for community, with one voice becoming many intermingling voices, together but always alone. The piece seemed an ideal “COVID” project – scored for 17 layered and looped violins. I could potentially create the work from start to finish, composing, performing, and recording it by myself in my own studio. As it turns out, by the time I got around to recording it, the process became far more collaborative.

The movement begins with the introduction of a five-chord motif, in which lower and higher notes move outward in contrary motion. This motif returns in many guises: as featured melodic material, or as a longer-form framework for a somber and somewhat disjointed melody. As the lead violin floats above a churning and dispersed accompaniment, a quality of unrest builds toward a final climax. The original motif and the melodic material return, this time joined and in parallel motion, exploring the limits of pitch and intensity on the violin before returning to the original melody as the work comes to a close.

© Tim Fain



## LACHEN VERLERNT (2002)

The title *Lachen Verlernt* (Laughing Unlearned) is a quotation from the ninth movement of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, "Gebet an Pierrot" (Prayer to Pierrot). The narrator declares that she has unlearned the skill of laughing and begs Pierrot, the "Horse-doctor to the soul," to give it back to her.

I felt that this is a very moving metaphor of a performer: a serious clown trying to help the audience to connect with emotions they have lost, or believe they have lost.

*Lachen Verlernt* is essentially a Chaconne, which in this case means that there is a harmonic progression that repeats itself several times. The harmony remains the same throughout the whole piece; only the surface, the top layer of the music changes.

*Lachen Verlernt* starts with a lyrical, expressive melody (the same melody has an important role in my orchestral work *Insomnia*, which I was writing at the same time, in the summer of 2002). Gradually the music becomes faster and more frenzied until it develops an almost frantic character, as if the imaginary narrator had reached a state of utter despair. A very short Coda closes this mini-drama peacefully.

I wrote *Lachen Verlernt* for Cho-Liang Lin, to whom it is also dedicated. *Lachen Verlernt* was commissioned by the La Jolla Music Society's SummerFest with the generous support of Joan & Irwin Jacobs.

© Esa-Pekka Salonen

## STOMP (2010)

What to include in a competition piece? One could write a virtuoso étude or a lyrical essay: but the judges would have dozens of pieces that demonstrate these virtues. I thought a more interesting piece would test a performer's imagination, intelligence, and musicality by offering interesting new problems to solve. Hence, this unaccompanied six-minute study I call *STOMP* written for the Tchaikovsky Competition in Russia.

*STOMP* poses its player three problems; of ear, style, and coordination. First, the violin's outer two strings are tuned to non-standard pitches. This mis-tuning (*scordatura*) deepens the instrument's range, and replaces the usual perfect fifths between strings with grating dissonances high and low. Second, the piece is modeled not on classical precedents, but on American fiddle music – bluegrass and jazz. And third, as in fiddle playing, the violinist must periodically stomp with his or her foot along with the music.

So *STOMP* demands a theatrical mind, an unerring ear, and a delight in making music with the entire body. It is supposed to be fun for the audience, and a workout for the soloist.

© John Corigliano



## **SARABANDE IN COMMON TIME (2016)**

*Sarabande in Common Time* was written for Jennifer Koh in response to Bach's Sarabande movement from Bach's *Partita No. 2*.

I'm reminded of *Morning Song* from the *Partita*, which is also in "common time," and imbued with a sweeping yet gently meandering flow. While introspective and contemplative in mood, there is a quietly nagging sense of despair that permeates throughout, emerging as soaring musical phrases that seem to spring from a long-hidden well of intense emotion.

## **EVENING SONG NO. 3 (2025)**

Listening to his compositions and watching *Einstein on the Beach*, I became mesmerized by Philip Glass' music as a child, never imagining that I'd have the privilege of working with him one day. I certainly couldn't have predicted we would become good friends and long-time collaborators, performing a wide range and variety of his work, both separately and together. That is exactly what happened, though, after Philip and I met in 2007 for his *Book of Longing* tour. After those performances, I broached the idea of his composing a large-scale work for unaccompanied violin for me – something really monumental. What emerged was the 33-minute *Partita for Solo Violin*, a multi-movement work on par in scope with J. S. Bach's towering solo works. It became the centerpiece of my *Portals* multimedia show and a solo album released on his label.

I'm just as taken with Philip's music to this day, and hoping for another work for this program, his *Evening Song No. 3* came into being. This new work, which receives its world premiere recording on this album, resonates with some of the elements from his earlier solo violin piece, *Sarabande in Common Time*. It's inwardly lyrical and profoundly affecting – always searching, wandering, delicate, and profoundly emotional – a deeply personal expression for the composer and performer, and a strikingly intimate ode to silence and isolation.

## ORNAMENT AND CRIME (2015)

Bryce and I first met during rehearsals for a Brooklyn performance we were giving with Philip Glass. During that performance, I remember being taken with a ten minute long guitar solo Bryce played without once actually touching the strings, using feedback and other extended techniques. Following that he invited me to be a part of “People Festival” in Berlin. During that busy time amidst performances and gatherings there, we discussed recording his work *Ornament and Crime*. We somehow managed to make time (mostly late at night) to record the piece in Saal 3 at the legendary Funkhaus.

The work of Austrian architect Adolph Loos was inspiring to Bryce when writing *Ornament and Crime*, in particular his essay of the same name (*Ornament und Verbrechen*). Loos was

known for his minimalist approach to design, advocating throughout his career for a new, plainer, and unadorned style of architecture. In Bryce’s work, he stripped the music down to structural austerity, nothing more than absolutely essential. As if the violin, akin to a vintage synthesizer, had an “arpeggiate” button, broken chords are repeated, changing slightly in rhythm and stress as the music evolves – sometimes in a quiet echo, as in Ornament II, or in outsize energetic intensity, as in Ornament IV. His work is always engaging, and startling for both performer and listener.

My recording of *Ornament and Crime* was featured in the show *Manhunt*, produced and released on Apple TV.

© Tim Fain

## DISSOLVE, O MY HEART (2010)



*Dissolve, O My Heart* was commissioned as a piece to reference Bach's Partita in D minor. This request was, to put it mildly, utterly terrifying; the last movement of the Partita – the Chaconne – is undoubtedly one of the most famous pieces of solo violin literature in the world. It overwhelmed Brahms, has been subject to hundreds of transcriptions and arrangements over the past two centuries, and is dizzying in its contrapuntal complexity, but I agreed to the project before I realized what I was getting myself into, and I realized this new piece should reflect Bach through a contemporary lens.

*Dissolve, O My Heart* begins with the first chord of Bach's Chaconne, a now-iconic D minor chord, and spins out from there into an off-kilter series of chords that doubles back on itself, collapses and ultimately dissolves in a torrent of fast passages. The only direct quote from the Partita is that first chord, which anchors the entire piece even as it threatens to spiral out of control. The title comes from an aria in the St. John's Passion, but has many potential interpretations.

© Missy Mazzoli

## RETURN TO EARTH (1987)



I first composed *Return to Earth* in 1987 as part of a work entitled *The Ringing Place*. Later, I included sections of *The Ringing Place* in Part III: Invisible Light in my opera *ATLAS: an opera in three parts*. *The Ringing Place* dealt with sound in space: how one could activate a space by singing so that the space itself would reverberate. I thought of *Return to Earth*, an energetic, pulsating piece, as the last section of the suite.

The basis of *Return to Earth* is a constant pulse forming the ground for a complex fabric of constantly shifting layers of musical material. At different times the layers imperceptibly appear and disappear. This subtle fading in and fading out is like slowly turning the volume knob

on a sound device. Sometimes the layers build to a complex texture; other times they clear out to one element. The piece is a series of events that continually move and transform.

I originally wrote *Return to Earth* as an a cappella piece for the singers of my Vocal Ensemble. Sung phonemes shaped its sound world, and each of our voices intrinsically contained a unique timbre. Invited by Tim Fain to work on an instrumental version, I was curious to find out how a rendition by a single instrument would alter the texture, color and contour of the work. Many thanks to Tim for his enthusiasm, virtuosity, and interest in this exploration.

© Meredith Monk

## TIM FAIN

Avery Fisher Career Grant-winning violinist and composer Tim Fain has appeared on today's greatest stages as orchestral soloist, recitalist and chamber musician. He is increasingly recognized for his work as a composer with an authentic voice, pushing the envelope with cutting-edge technology.

Fain's violin concerto *Edge of a Dream* was premiered across the United States. His work *Resonance*, commissioned by Google/YouTube for a groundbreaking VR video, was recorded by The Knights, with conductor Eric Jacobsen, and subsequently shown at the Sundance Film Festival. His works were also used for campaigns by Sierra Club, Made in a Free World, The North Face, and Ralph Lauren.

Heard on the soundtracks to the GRAMMY®-nominated *Black Swan*, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, *12 Years a Slave*, *Moonlight*, *Don't Look Up*, *Indignation*, and HBO's *Succession*, Fain is also known for his original film music, with scores for *Munch* (Best Nordic Film nominee, Göteborg Film Festival) and stop-motion film *Los Huesos* (Best Short, Venice Film Festival).

Fain continues to be at the forefront of technology, with boundary-pushing projects and VR experiences for Samsung at the Tribeca Film Festival, Facebook/Oculus, NYC's The Future of Storytelling, Forbes and the city of Jerusalem, and SXSW. Fain's LED light installation with Symmetry Labs was featured on BBC and PBS, and he gave a TEDx talk on emerging technologies in music.

Whether touring in a duo with Philip Glass, performing as soloist with the National Orchestra of Spain or American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, or collaborating with artists ranging from Mitsuko Uchida to composer Meredith Monk, Bryce Dessner, DJ Spooky, Iggy Pop, Rob Thomas (Matchbox Twenty), or Christina Aguilera, Fain electrifies audiences. His wildly diverse career has taken him to unique spaces world-wide, including on-stage at the NYC Ballet, the Vatican, and a performance for His Holiness the Dalai Lama's birthday. He performs on a Francesco Gobetti violin from Venice (1717), the "Moller," on extended loan from Clement and Karen Arrison through the generous efforts of the Stradivari Society of Chicago.

**UNRAVELING:**

Recorded at Blind Bay Studios, MT, 03/25-26/2023  
Produced by Tim Fain  
Edited by Michael Riesman  
Mixed by Tim Fain, and by Oscar Zambrano  
at Zampol Studios, NY  
Mastered by Jeanne Velonis

**ORNAMENT AND CRIME:**

Recorded at Saal 3, Funkhaus, Berlin, 08/15-16/2018  
Engineered by Jonathan Lowe  
Produced by Bryce Dessner and Tim Fain  
Edited by Michael Riesman  
Mixed by Oscar Zambrano at Zampol Studios, NY  
Mastered by Jeanne Velonis

**RETURN TO EARTH:**

Recorded at Blind Bay Studios, MT, 03/27-29/2023  
Produced by Tim Fain and Oscar Zambrano  
Edited by Michael Riesman  
Mixed by Tim Fain, Oscar Zambrano  
at Zampol Studios, NY  
Mastered by Jeanne Velonis

**ALL OTHER TRACKS:**

Recorded at Blind Bay Studios, MT, 04/02-06/2023  
Produced by Tim Fain and Oscar Zambrano  
Edited by Michael Riesman  
Mixed by Oscar Zambrano at Zampol Studios, NY  
Mastered by Jeanne Velonis

**ATMOS MIXES (for ALL TRACKS):**

Mixed at Audiosmith Digital Solutions,  
DiMenna Center, NY  
Produced and mixed by Oscar Zambrano  
Assisted by Piotr Garbaczone

**PRODUCTION:**

Artistic director: Charles Adriaenssen  
Executive producer: Timothée van der Stegen  
Design: Pragma Création  
Photos: © Brian Powers

**THANKS:**

“Huge thanks to everyone who helped this album come into being: Elizabeth and Allison at Dworkin & Co., Karen Arrison, Brian Powers, Stuart Slates, John Walker, Rob Parr, Paige and Gabriel at the Stradivari Society; Richard Guérin, Oscar Zambrano, Michael Riesman, Jeanne Velonis, Piotr Garbaczone, Jonathan Lowe, The DiMenna Center, Funkhaus; the composers: Bryce, Philip, Missy, Esa-Pekka, John, and Meredith; and to Mom, Dad, Nick, and my wonderful and supportive family.”

**SCORE PUBLISHERS:**

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Dissolve, O My Heart © G. Schirmer Inc./Wise Music Classical  
Return to Earth © Boosey & Hawkes

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**TIM FAIN**

*violin*

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1. **Unraveling\*** Tim Fain 5:22
  2. **Lachen Verlernt** Esa-Pekka Salonen 7:55
  3. **STOMP** John Corigliano 5:54
  4. **Sarabande in Common Time** Philip Glass 5:14
  5. **Evening Song No. 3\*** Philip Glass 3:56
  - Ornament and Crime** Bryce Dessner
  6. Ornament I 3:40
  7. Ornament II 2:18
  8. Ornament III 5:55
  9. Ornament IV 2:29
  10. **Dissolve, O My Heart** Missy Mazzoli 6:04
  11. **Return to Earth\*** Meredith Monk 5:09

*\* Premiere recording*

**Total Running Time**

**53:56**