

A collage of red and orange textured paper. On the left, there are vertical orange stripes. In the center, there are several circular cutouts of varying shades of red and orange. At the bottom, a fern branch is visible. The overall aesthetic is bohemian and artistic.

# EKMELES

WE LIVE THE OPPOSITE DARING





## EKMELES

Charlotte Mundy, soprano  
Elisa Sutherland, mezzo-soprano  
Timothy Parsons, countertenor  
Tomás Cruz, tenor  
Jeffrey Gavett, baritone and artistic director  
Steven Hrycelak, bass

Recording Location: Oktaven Audio, Mt. Vernon, NY  
Recording Dates: *Primo Libro*, this is but an oration of loss, love is, *Waves*, *Mouthpiece 36*, July 24-27, 2023; *We live the opposite daring*, November 10, 2023  
Producers: Zosha Di Castri, Jeffrey Gavett, Erin Gee, Hannah Kendall, Shawn Jaeger, James Weeks, and Ryan Streber  
Engineering, mixing, mastering: Ryan Streber  
Editing: Charles Mueller  
Art and design: Alex Eckman-Lawn

### **James Weeks - *Primo Libro* (2012-2016)**

*Primo Libro* is an attempt to write a 'primal' madrigal book exploring fundamental relationships of text, sound, harmony, contour and expression, consisting of 16 short madrigals for one, two or four voices, each lasting about a minute and operating as parts of the whole rather than separate pieces. It is written in 31-division Equal Temperament (31-ET), a close approximation of extended quarter-comma meantone, in which major and minor triads on all scale degrees can be tuned near-justly. The 31-degree scale was theorised and applied to vocal and keyboard music in the mid-16th century by Nicolò Vicentino but fell into disuse after his death. As well as distinguishing between sharps and flats (C# being a different, flatter pitch than Db, etc.), 31-ET also employs 1/5-tone sharp and flat pitches to make a scale in which all notes are approximately 1/5 of a tone (38.71c) apart. Much of the music of *Primo Libro* exploits 31-ET's propensity for nearly-pure major and minor triads. Additionally, neutral triads (the third degree of the scale exactly bisected between major and minor) are used, as well as more closely-spaced chords, echoing Vicentino's theories of diatonic, chromatic and enharmonic harmony.

*Primo Libro* is dedicated to Ekmeles and Jeff Gavett, with admiration.



I  
*feso*

a- mar- amor  
gravos-  
a morte

ma

mar tormento  
alma  
m'ancide

II

Ahi la donna lasso mi vede  
più pia  
un gridar  
pietosi accenti  
risonar lamenti

III

Madonna s'io v'offendo  
perdon morir tacendo  
radoppia martire  
mi fa morire.  
vo lasso pur dire  
non sol m'uccide  
me crudel e ria,  
no'l vo dir pia

IV

Lodar voi, donne ingrato,  
per riportavi al cielo  
far freddo il caldo e caldo il gelo;

Il ciel, donne, a voi diede  
in dono  
il falso amor, ma non già il bello  
Ciechi gli amanti sono

Amore,  
darvi in preda o darvi in core.

I  
*tense*

o- tor- love  
heavy  
to death

but

sea anguish  
soul  
kills me

II

Ah the lady sees I am wretched  
more kind  
a scream  
pitiful cries  
re-echo laments

IV

My Lady if I offend you  
forgive to die in silence  
redoubling torture  
kills me.  
though I want, alas, to say  
not only kills me  
to me cruel and wicked  
don't want to say kind

IV

To praise you, ungrateful women,  
reporting to heaven  
make cold hot and hot cold;

Heaven gave you, ladies,  
as a gift  
the false love, but not yet the beautiful  
Blind are the lovers  
Love,  
giving you for prey or giving you a heart.



V  
*gridante*

Ahimè, dov' è'l bel viso,  
e dove ripost' era  
dov' è'l bel viso      bel viso  
ahime, ahime  
o fortuna, o morte ingorda

dov' è'l ben mio

VI  
*legatissimo e scorrevole*

Non ch'io non voglio mai altro pensiero  
nel mio cor albergarmi  
che de la donna mia,  
e quanto mai potesse cortesia  
amor in altra farmi.  
Tutto ho per vile e spregio  
che via più molto pregio  
ancor ch'ella non prezzi il servir lei  
che quanto mai d'ogni altra aver potrei.

VII

Se vi              si-  
                         vo viver

Ché  
                 si  
                 vi vo      di-

VIII  
*brillante*

Quanta beltà, quanta gratia e splendore  
si vidde in donna mai,  
vaga Angioletta  
quant' alta cortessia quanto valore  
regnò in donna gia mai  
tutt'in voi regna con pietate e fede  
i divin' occhi e costumi santi  
il bel volto e le chiome  
d'Angela son insieme col bel nome.

V  
*crying out*

Alas, where is that sweet face,  
and where reposed  
where is that sweet face      sweet face  
alas, alas  
O fortune, O greedy death

where is my darling

VI  
*extremely connected and flowing*

I don't ever want any other thought  
to live in my heart than  
that of my own lady,  
and no amount of courtesy could  
make me love another.  
I consider everything vile and disgraceful  
that is much more valuable  
even if she doesn't prize me serving her  
I could never have more from another.

VII

If you              la-  
                         wish to live

For  
                 if  
                 want you      sa-

VIII  
*brilliant*

How much beauty, grace and splendour  
was ever seen in woman,  
fair Angel  
so much courtesy, so much valour  
has never reigned in woman  
everything reigns in you with piety and faith  
the heavenly eyes and saintly habits  
the beautiful face and hair  
all belong to an Angel, with your fair name.



IX  
*lucente*

Qual Clitia sempre al maggior lume intenta  
per verdi prati suole  
volgersi lieta ai bei raggi del sole  
tale io forse non degna  
sempre a voi lieta mi rivolgo e dico:  
o felice sostegno  
della mia vita ben, t'è'l ciel amico.

X  
*dolce e legatissimo*

Quando con dolce suono  
s'accordon le dolcissime parole  
ch'escon fra bianche perle e bei rubini  
  
ed odo accenti alti e divini  
  
direste ben udir doppia sirena,  
  
è più che'l sol assai lucente e bella

XI  
*legatissimo e scorrevole*

Non v'accorgete amanti  
che di costei nel viso  
raccolto è tutto'l bel del paradiso?  
La doppia sua bellezza  
fa pur che'l ciel s'adira  
e che natura ogni altra odia e disprezza.

chi di costei non parla a tutte l'ore  
o non è vivo o non conosce amore.

IX  
*shining*

Like Clytia, always intent on that brightest light,  
happily in green meadows  
turns to the beautiful rays of the sun,  
I too, perhaps unworthy,  
always turn to you joyfully and say:  
O kind support  
of my own life, may heaven be your friend.

X  
*gentle and extremely connected*

When with sweet sound  
the sweetest words agree  
sung between white pearls and lovely rubies  
  
and I hear accents high and divine  
  
you would swear you heard a double siren  
  
she's brighter and more beautiful than the sun

XI  
*extremely connected and flowing*

Do you lovers not realise  
that in her face  
is gathered all the beauty of paradise?  
Her double beauty  
makes the sky angry  
and makes all other nature loathe and despise it.

He who does not speak of her at all times  
either lives not, or knows not love.







XV  
*rovente*

Ver' infern' e'l mio petto,  
ver' infernale spirito son' io,  
e ver' infernal foco e'l foco mio.  
Senza fin' ardo e son di speme privo,  
e dell' amat' obietto,  
eternamente l'alma vista' ho persa,  
et ostinato in una voglia vivo,  
sol di tant' e diversa  
la sorte mia dalla perdita gente,  
ch'a ragion quella et io ard' innocente,  
maladice sovente,  
et odia quella il suo fattor' Iddio,  
et io chi m'arde laud' amo' e desio.

XVI  
*fulgido*

Il ciel  
    rallegra  
onde felice  
donna sì dolce e pia

qual fior    verde erbetta a mezzo aprile.

XV  
*red-hot, burning*

True hell is my breast,  
true hellish spirit am I,  
and true infernal fire is my ardour.  
I burn endlessly and am deprived of hope  
and of the beloved object,  
I have eternally lost sight of my soul,  
and stubborn in desire I live,  
so great and different  
my fate from the lost souls,  
who burn for good reason, while I do innocently:  
they often curse,  
and hate God their maker,  
but I praise, love and desire that which burns me.

XVI  
*bright, shining*

Heaven  
    becomes joyful  
happy waves  
woman so sweet and good

than flowers            the green grass in April.

Petrarchistic lyrics set by Jacques Arcadelt in his *Primo libro de' Madrigali* (1539)







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someone will remember us  
I say  
even in another time

μνάσασθαί τινά φάμι † καὶ ἕτερον † ἀμμέων

### **Hannah Kendall - this is but an oration of loss (2022)**

"...Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain that they may live."  
Ezekiel 37:9

*this is but an oration of loss* reimagines the songs, cries, lamentations, incantations, and sighs of M. NourbeSe Philip's book-length poem *Zong!*, which is itself a reworking of the 1783 legal transcript of the Gregson vs. Gilbert case that details the drowning of 130 enslaved Africans, having been thrown overboard the British slave ship, *Zong*, en route to Jamaica.

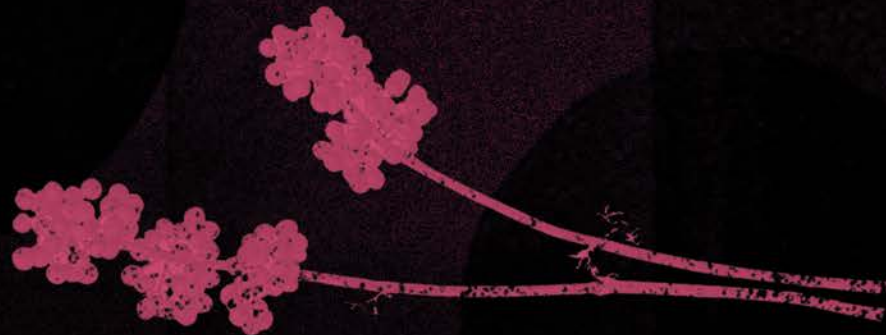
Voices initially emerge from a meditative chorus of harmonicas, an instrument associated with Afro-diasporic sorrow, uttering fragmented text, and chanting biblical passages that conjure images of bones, tendons, and flesh, whilst classic(al) tunes referencing water interweave the textures from tiny wind-up music boxes.

I am deeply grateful to M. NourbeSe Philip for granting the permission to set their iconic and groundbreaking text, and to Ekmeles for commissioning this piece.

HK.

### **Shawn Jaeger - love is (2021)**

L-O-V-E: what is it, anyway? *love is* dramatizes the difficulty in talking about and understanding that oh-so-important, four-letter word. The text is made up of near-rhymes and anagrams derived from a paraphrase of a line by feminist scholar bell hooks. Initially, everyone's saying different things, and the music, though in motion, can't quite go anywhere. After some surreal detours, it finally resolves into focus, and action: love, it turns out, is more than a feeling, and action has got to do, got to do with it.





buzzes  
shoved his  
pluses  
thrushes  
blushes  
sludges  
grudges  
trusses  
crutches  
clutches  
tongue is  
rushes  
brushes  
blood is  
buses  
touches  
notice saliva on  
vacation lesion  
snail evocation  
avails no notice  
nice lava soot  
in antisocial oven  
a violent casino  
in a civet saloon  
brushes  
blood is  
buses  
touches  
such is  
judges  
what is  
of his  
can smashing  
fan passion  
van crashing  
grant wagon  
land faction  
gland captain

hand waxen  
sand flaxen  
salvation, no ice (with)  
cavities on loan (and)  
neon coital visa (for)  
ancient ova soil  
ovations in lace (with)  
cat invasion, olé (and)  
atonal invoices (for)  
vain stoical eon  
glove biz  
nudges  
dove whiz  
of fizz  
such is  
love is  
what is  
of his  
love is  
love is  
what is  
of his  
love is...  
an ion act  
a tan icon  
it a canon?  
distraction  
transaction  
contraction  
abstraction  
refraction  
attraction  
compassion  
expansion  
an action  
love is an action





### **Jeffrey Gavett - Waves (2019/2022)**

*Waves* is a triptych written for a 2019 performance at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Artist Oliver Beer's *Vessel Orchestra* was an instrument made from hollow objects in the Met's collection, which comprised a chromatic scale. They were activated through feedback with individual microphones, controlled from a keyboard. In the original performance of *Waves*, I played at the keyboard and sang. The timbre of the vessels was something like a sine tone, which recalled the work of Alvin Lucier, so I wrote *Waves* to exploit beating patterns of glissandi and almost-unisons. Since the *Vessel Orchestra* no longer exists, I wrote this new version using samples of our own voices, originally recorded by Christopher Trapani for his work *End Words*. While the timbres have changed, the work's relation to acoustic beating remains, and the use of samples of our own voices allows us to sing in or out of tune with our own individual voices.

### **Erin Gee - Mouthpiece 36 (2021)**

Within the taxonomy of sounds that comprise the *Mouthpiece* series, *Mouthpiece 36* flies in some newly excavated aural pockets.

I recorded 150 improvised vocal sound files, then transcribed and categorized them. Most were improvised in nature spaces while focusing on the rhythmic intricacy and sonic relationships of fauna as it coexists and listens within the ecosystem. For each part of the piece, I chose sounds from this 150 that represented their own distinct sound ecology.

Light, yet gravitationally aware, Part 1 is the inner life of higher altitudes. When grit and nasality meet in Part 2, I've dug a place for the madrigal. The rain has small enough hands\* to hold each sound of Part 3, and so it occurs just once, the one time giving space for the small moment. Inwardly constructed, Part 4's fragmented madrigal was then infused/folded in with spatialized eco-turbulence. The pacing of the gestures in Part 4 is meant to evoke my sense of curiosity and wonder in the appearance of minutiae in nature – an experience of time and eventfulness that is at odds with the temporality of tonal structures and forms.

\*[somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond] by e.e. cummings (1931)

The commission of *Mouthpiece 36* has been made possible by the Chamber Music America Classical Commissioning Program, with generous funding provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.



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, Martin Iddon, Hannah Kendall, Christopher Trapani and James Weeks.

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, 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 the US premieres of Stefano Gervasoni’s *Dir - In Dir* and Wolfgang Rihm’s concert-length *ET LUX*. Ekmeles joined with members of Tilt Brass and loadbang for the US premiere of Mathias Spahlinger’s monumental *über den frühen tod früheins anna augusta marggräfin zu baden*, and Wolfgang Rihm’s *SKOTEINÓS*. 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.

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.



1. **Primo Libro** (2012-2016) by James Weeks
- We live the opposite daring** (2023) by Zosha Di Castri
2. I
3. II
4. III
5. IV
6. **this is but an oration of loss** (2022) by Hannah Kendall
7. **love is** (2021) by Shawn Jaeger
- Waves** (2019/2022) by Jeffrey Gavett
8. I
9. II
10. III
- Mouthpiece 36** (2021) by Erin Gee
11. Part 1
12. Part 2
13. Part 3
14. Part 4

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