

strange flowers

CHAMBER MUSIC BY **KIRK O'RIORDAN**



The six pieces on this recording were composed between 2000 and 2012. In preparing these pieces for this project, I became more aware of aspects of my current compositional practice that had their origins in these earlier pieces. These pieces were chosen for this project because I think they highlight some of my most important artistic values and because together they tell an interesting story.

This story would remain untold, however, were it not for the performers who tell it with such incredible passion. I am profoundly grateful to Holly, Reuben, Marianne, and Larry, and to every performer who has committed so much of themselves to my music.

- Kirk O’Riordan

Sonata Rapsodica (2009) features dark resonances and quicksilver flights of the clarinet poised against jaunty dance figures of the piano. Between opening and closing sections of extended meditation, O’Riordan unspools joyous and energetic outbursts by both players, interwoven and counterpoised in ways that are uncommonly satisfying to the listener. The composer’s stated intent of invoking an “elation of spirit” through this music prevails throughout.

Water Lilies (2000) makes no secret of its homage to the treasured products of Monet’s Giverny, yet O’Riordan guides us in unexplored directions by shifting eye and ear away from the single image, mounted flat on a museum wall. Rather, he situates us in the center of a circular display space, as if standing in the sonic crossfire of images constantly broken and nuanced by dances of light and alternating cascades of color and sensation. As if to settle the fleeting wisps of forms, O’Riordan favors slowly shifting tones and chordal textures, open in space.

Pressing Forward, Pushing Back (2005) is a substantial etude for flute and piano. With a rather rambunctious commotion of melodic lines and rhythmic figures, it places the two instruments in agitated dialogue with each other, with call and response cascades of musical originality and discovery. The composer cites several moments of transition, each tied to emotional states - at times “frenetic, angry, sad, and lyrical,” all surrendering to a final resolve offered to the listener as “a beautifully hopeful statement.”

Inspired by Dylan Thomas’s iconic villanelle “Do not go Gentle into the Night,” **Dying Light (2004)** steps to death’s very threshold with the most human of all powers of survival. At once flamboyant in outward assertiveness and inward in humble meditation and resolve, this poetic

challenge to death's finality guides the listener through a gamut of emotional passageways. The title itself proclaims the urge to resist the inexorable fact of a light that is dying. The density of musical exchanges shows, with unexpected beauty, the heroic texture of human struggle, with unflinching affirmation of life's gift against the forces of annihilation. O'Riordan suggests that these sequences of structural progression successfully sustain this journey of spiritual knowledge by virtue of the many recurring gestural coherences to the harmonic bedrock of the opening chord, whose haunting repetitions are never far from the listener's journey through the work.

A Strange Flower for Birds and Butterflies (2012), the most recent of the disc's compositions is the second of the disc's works anchored in poetry: in this instance a haiku by Matsuo Basho. With gauzy layers of meaning more hinted at than declaimed, Basho's haiku (quoted here in its entirety: *a strange flower/for birds and butterflies/the autumn sky*) invokes the unspoken mystery of the flower's "strangeness." The unfolding poem fills in the gaps, as the vernal domains of bird and butterfly - youthful, life-renewing, fresh in innocence - clash with the dark and foreboding colors of the autumnal sky. Vital bursts of fresh life suspended against autumn's warning signs of decline help to explain this "strange flower," in full blossom and conscious of its waning. *A Strange Flower* offers the composer means of exploring exchanges among the three musicians that are unusually rich and virtuosic with an affecting work of textural eloquence that enfolds the poetic and pictorial landscape laid out in Basho's haiku.

Lacrimosa (2011), a work for solo piano, concludes the disc. With this title, O'Riordan invites the listener to reconsider, within the sheltered realm of personal reflection the great choral settings of this text, from Mozart's militant assaults against death to the soaringly poignant settings in the Requiems of Berlioz and Verdi. O'Riordan's prayer is more personal, more guarded, more circumspect, and the carefully executed textural quests by pianist Holly Roadfeldt lead the listener to realms of penance, forgiveness, and transcendence every bit as potent and satisfying. The measured rhetorical figures of the piano approximate human speech in uncanny ways, as if prayer were issuing from the tonal clusters of rhythm, phrasing, and duration – the quietly dignified utterances of the most humane penitence and grace.

- Ellis Finger



Holly Roadfeldt made her orchestral debut with the Toledo Symphony Orchestra at the age of 13 and has been actively performing standard and eclectic recital programs as a solo pianist and as a chamber musician in the United States, Europe, and Asia. Holly's numerous collaborative projects have included commissioning new works for solo piano by American composers, founding the contemporary piano duo (duoARTia) with pianist Jeri-Mae Astolfi, giving a live performance of Chopin's 24 Preludes with the Marie Chouinard Dance Company, and performing recitals with members of the New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

www.hollyroadfeldt.com



As a flutist, Reuben Council remains in demand as a soloist and chamber musician. He currently serves as Principal Flute of the Williamsport Symphony Orchestra, and has taught at Susquehanna University, Lycoming College, Bloomsburg University, and The Ohio State University. Reuben is heard regularly on the Noon Concert Series and the Close-Up Concert Series in Williamsport, PA. He has been featured on WVIA's Simply Grand Concert Series, the Mid-South Flute Society Convention, and was a guest soloist with the Williamsport Symphony Youth Orchestra. He holds degrees from Western Carolina University and UNC-Greensboro. His teachers include Eldred Spell, Deborah Egekvist, and William Bennett. Reuben also studied the acoustics of the modern flute including head joint building and design.



Marianne Gythfeldt has distinguished herself in chamber music, orchestral and contemporary music performance on the international stage. She is equally at-home in traditional, contemporary and alternative genres as clarinetist of Zephyros Winds, Ensemble Sospeso, SEM Ensemble, and former member of the Naumburg award-winning group New Millennium Ensemble. She is especially recognized in the fields of electroacoustic music, contemporary chamber music and performance education. She is faculty at Brooklyn College Conservatory and former professor at University of Delaware where she won the Delaware Division of the Arts established artist award. Gythfeldt has recorded with CBS Masterworks, CRI, Albany, Koch and Mode Records.

www.mariannegythfeldt.com



Hailed in Strings Magazine for “style and elegance” and “lyrical expressiveness,” Lawrence Stomberg enjoys a career as soloist, chamber musician and pedagogue. He is cellist of the acclaimed Serafin String Quartet, with whom he performs throughout the United States, and has recorded for the Naxos and Centaur labels. Recent seasons have brought him to venues throughout the U.S. and abroad, including solo debuts in Colombia, China and Great Britain. A committed interpreter of new music, he champions new works by many American composers, including commissions and first recordings. An active and dedicated pedagogue, Stomberg joined the music faculty at the University of Delaware in 2004, where he is currently Associate Professor of Cello.

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Kirk O'Riordan (b. 1968) is an active composer, conductor, saxophonist, and teacher. Performances of his music have been featured at festivals and conferences across the United States and Europe and have been recorded on the ERM-Media and EnF labels.

O'Riordan's music has been referred to as "unapologetically beautiful" and is often praised for its uniquely "visual" qualities, which depict a wide range of striking moods. Recent projects have included commissions from AVID-duo and the Lafayette College Percussion Ensemble; a new work for wind



ensemble; and performances at the World Saxophone Congress in St. Andrews, Scotland; the Alvin Ailey Theater (New York); and in the Czech Republic. He is currently composing an opera with author Lee Upton.

Since 2009, O’Riordan has been a member of the faculty at Lafayette College (Easton PA) where he teaches courses in music composition, theory, and serves as conductor of the Lafayette College Concert Band. He holds degrees in composition, conducting, and saxophone performance from Arizona State University, Northwestern University, Indiana University, Bowling Green State University, and the University of Denver.

O’Riordan has studied composition with Rodney Rogers, Randall Shinn, Glenn Hackbarth, James De Mars, Burton Beerman, Donald M. Wilson, and Marilyn Shrude. His saxophone teachers include Frederick L. Hemke, Eugene Rousseau, and John Sampen.

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All tracks composed by **Kirk O'Riordan**

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Session Engineer **Timothy Frey**

Pre-production **Timothy Frey** and **Kirk O'Riordan**

Piano Technician **Chris Solliday**, RPT

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- Sonata rapsodica (2009)** for Clarinet and Piano
Marianne Gythfeldt, clarinet; Holly Roadfeldt, piano
- 1 freely; quietly agitated 6:30
- 2 flowing; spirited and energetic 7:41
- 3 **Water Lilies (2000)** for Solo Piano 8:07
Holly Roadfeldt, piano
- 4 **Pressing Forward, Pushing Back (2005)** for Flute and Piano 13:46
Reuben Councill, flute; Holly Roadfeldt, piano
- 5 **Dying Light (2004)** for Violoncello and Piano 14:03
Lawrence Stomberg, violoncello; Holly Roadfeldt, piano
- 6 **A Strange Flower for Birds and Butterflies (2012)** 15:18
for Clarinet, Violoncello, and Piano
Marianne Gythfeldt, clarinet; Lawrence Stomberg, violoncello; Holly Roadfeldt, piano
- 7 **Lacrimosa (2011)** for Solo Piano 6:45
Holly Roadfeldt, piano

