



JOHANN PEZEL

(1639-1694)

Opus Musicum Sonatarum Praestantissimarum Senis Instrumentis Instructum

“The Alphabet Sonatas”

Disc 1	61'58"	Disc 2	75'15"
1. Sonata Abella in G	5'19"	1. Sonata Nabathea in G	6'11"
2. Sonata Baccha in d	7'07"	2. Sonata Octavia in d	5'17"
3. Sonata Cadmea in a	4'36"	3. Sonata Padusa in a	5'34"
4. Sonata Dejanira in e	4'47"	4. Sonata Quinquatria in e	5'04"
5. Sonata Ebura in B-flat	4'47"	5. Sonata Rha in B-flat	5'22"
6. Sonata Fabaria in F	4'22"	6. Sonata Sabaea in F	6'18"
7. Sonata Gaba in C	7'07"	7. Sonata Tamara in C	4'37"
8. Sonata Hoemonia in g	5'35"	8. Sonata Vacuna in g	6'38"
9. Sonata Ja in D	4'18"	9. Sonata Wallona in D	5'11"
10. Sonata Kohlerina in A	4'17"	10. Sonata Xantippea in A	4'49"
11. Sonata Laconia in E	4'14"	11. Sonata Yvana in E	5'16"
12. Sonata Macra in b	5'34"	12. Sonata Zacchantea in b	5'12"
		13. Sonata Ciacona in B-flat	9'50"





Johann Christoph Pezel was born in 1639 in Glatz (modern-day Klodzko, Poland), and he attended school in Budissin (Bautzen, Germany), where he was apprenticed to Nicolaus Leuterding, the town's director of instrumental music. In 1664, Pezel was hired in Leipzig as a *Kunstgeiger* ("art-fiddler"), a low-level civic musician. Prior to 1664, Leipzig had only three *Kunstgeigern*, but that year the city added an assistant position, expecting it to be filled by a "peace-loving" man who was an excellent player of the *clarino* (high trumpet), a difficult instrument with political complications.

Kunstgeigern in Leipzig were expected to be proficient on all instruments, but they primarily performed on strings, substituting occasionally on winds for unavailable *Stadtpfeiferen* ("city-pipers"), their superiors. In Leipzig, the *Kunstgeigern* and *Stadtpfeiferen* shared a treasury and an uneasy alliance against non-municipally-employed—and therefore non-regulated—musicians, whom they called *Bierfiedlers* ("beer-fiddlers") and less flattering names. However, both groups were of a lower rank than the *Kammeradschaft*, a trumpet guild which enjoyed special Imperial privileges including exclusive rights over that instrument. This led in various cities to performances on trombones "played in the manner of trumpets," to the construction of unusually-shaped trumpets that could be called by alternative names, and subsequently to numerous lawsuits and several incidents of physical assault against *Stadtpfeiferen* by *Kammeradschaft* trumpeters.

Pezel was promoted to *Stadtpfeifer* in 1669. The four *Stadtpfeiferen* in Leipzig were tenured for life and exempt from taxes, and they and their families shared free lodgings in a house in the city center on a street known as *Stadtpfeiffergässlein* (now called *Magazingasse*). They were allowed to perform on trumpet in the city tower or the church, although by Imperial regulation they were only permitted to practice or teach the instrument within the confines of the tower or outside the city limits. As a *Stadtpfeifer*, Pezel's main duty was the *Abblasen*—daily performances at 10am and 6pm on wind and brass instruments from the city tower—but the majority of Pezel's income would have come

from freelance work at weddings, celebrations, and church services.

In 1673, Pezel became director of one of the informal *collegia musica* at the Leipzig University. He applied twice for the position of *Stadtmusikant* (director of instrumental music) in Dresden, but he was not seriously considered. In Leipzig, he also applied for the post of *Thomaskirche Kantor* in 1676 after the death of Sebastian Knüpfer, but the position was given to Johann Schelle. Unproven ties to Catholicism were cited as the main explanation for Pezel's rejection, although this was likely not the true reason. As a mere *Stadtpfeifer* without a university degree, Pezel was inherently of a lower social class, despite being celebrated for having attained a high level of learning (he was fluent in Italian and Latin and wrote several treatises, one of which—a scholarly debate on the nature of werewolves—has recently resurfaced).

Pezel was promoted to *Präfect* (the senior *Stadtpfeifer*) in 1679 or 1680, but he did not hold this position long; Leipzig was ravaged by a plague in 1680 and all celebratory music was put on hold. As a result, the majority of Pezel's income would have vanished. When Pezel's former teacher, Leuterding, died in 1680, Pezel was offered the post in Bautzen of *Stadtmusikant*. He accepted the position and returned to Bautzen in 1681.

Bautzen was then about half as large as Leipzig (whereas today it is less than a tenth its size), but Pezel's total income in Bautzen was comparable to what he had been accustomed, and he eventually purchased a fine house. The city added a second organ loft to store the many instruments Pezel brought from Leipzig, and Pezel began overseeing construction of a new organ. He had four subordinate *Stadtpfeiferen*, and a great deal of personal control over all instrumental music in the city. He no longer had to compete with students from the Leipzig *collegia* for freelance work, or to deal with the complicated social stratification of *Kunstgeigern* and *Stadtpfeiferen*.

Nevertheless, the Bautzen city records reveal some amount of squabbling. Pezel was reprimanded on several occasions for misusing

trumpets and timpani by playing them at minor celebrations, when they should have been reserved for weddings of the nobility. He fired one of his underlings, who then went over Pezel's head to demand reinstatement from the city council. A local *Bierfiedler* accused Pezel of performing at weddings of manual laborers, which legally were the province of lesser musicians. Most troublesome was Pezel's sour relationship with the two other top musicians in Bautzen, the organist Schröer and particularly the *Kantor* Gombrecht. Pezel filed several formal complaints against Gombrecht for preventing him from leading church music on alternate weeks, as was his privilege. (Gombrecht was also accused of causing "inappropriate accidents" at weddings and performing lackadaisically at schools, as well as requesting "gifts" from the schoolboys.)

Pezel published *Opus Musicum Sonatarum Praestantissimarum Senis Instrumentis Instructum* ("Musical Work of Splendid Sonatas for Ancient Instruments") in Frankfurt in 1686, and he dedicated it to the councils of the "Hexapolis," the six principal cities of Upper Lusatia (Bautzen, Görlitz, Lauban, Kamenz, Löbau, and Zittau). Pezel had been performing for the councils for a number of years; they always had music at their meetings and elections, and in 1681 they added a rule, likely at Pezel's request, that the *Stadtmusikant* was allowed to ask for a tip. For *Opus Musicum Sonatarum*, Pezel received twelve *Taler*—the equivalent of several weeks' income—each from Bautzen and Görlitz, and unknown sums from the other four cities.

Pezel "gently fell asleep" and never awoke on October 13, 1694. His death was likely unexpected, as only a month earlier he had appeared before the city council "adamantly requesting" to play music at weddings, despite a temporary funerary ban. He was survived by his wife, Susanna—whom he had married in 1665, the daughter of a Leipzig dance master—and four children. Susanna continued to receive Pezel's income until her own death just under a year later. She sold their house and Pezel's music to one of his *Stadtppfeiferen*, Samuel Kade, who succeeded him as Bautzen *Stadtmusikant*. Shortly before she died, Susanna paid 170 *Taler* to complete the organ that had been

Pezel's project for a number of years.

Little else is known of Pezel, and even some of the information above, such as his birthplace, has been called into question. Pezel's biography has been confused by numerous factors, particularly his own inconsistent use of variants on his name. In his published instrumental works alone, he appears as Johanne Pezelio, Johann Bezeld, Johann and Johannes Pezelius, Johann Pezoldt, Johanne Pecelio, Johannis Pezelii, and Ioh. Pezely. Complicating matters further, there were composers with similar names publishing music in the same region in the same era (e.g., Johann Christoph Pez, Christian Petzold, and Johanne Pecelius), and their music and histories are often erroneously conflated with Pezel's.

Pezel's legacy consists of several volumes of instrumental music, the majority of which are simple sonatas and dance suites in four and five parts. Much of Pezel's output was *Turmmusik* ("tower-music" to be played for the *Abblasen*). Several sacred and vocal works often attributed to Pezel were likely the compositions of Pecelius, an Augustinian monk based in Prague, although the assignments might never be certain. Pezel stands out among *Stadtppfeiferen* for having had any compositions published—which was both time-consuming and expensive—although his successor in Leipzig, Gottfried Reiche (who is perhaps best known as J.S. Bach's trumpeter), also printed a collection of *Turmmusik*.

Opus Musicum Sonatarum, Pezel's largest work, is a collection of twenty-five sonatas for two violins, three violas, bassoon or violone, and *basso continuo*. The viola parts (which respectively appear in tenor, alto, and soprano clefs) can be performed on violas *da gamba*, but they were likely intended for violas *da braccio*. Pezel's choice of the bassoon might seem odd, but bassoons and trombones were not uncommon *obligato* and *continuo* instruments throughout Bohemia during this era. Violone most likely meant some form of violoncello, but it might also have been a bass viol or a small "G violone" playing at eight-foot pitch.

The sonatas are organized by key; two sets of twelve sonatas each have

key signatures in a sequence of ascending fifths starting from G (with a diminished fifth from E to B-flat to prevent travel to overly difficult keys). This grouping of a collection by key was highly unusual but not without precedent. Carefully-arranged sets of pieces by Gorzanis, Galilei, and others preceded *Opus Musicum Sonatarum*, and collections by Muffat, Fischer, Graupner, and Pachelbel followed it closely, with the most famous example, J.S. Bach's *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*, BWV 846-869, dating from 1722.

Perhaps the most idiosyncratic aspect of *Opus Musicum Sonatarum* is that each of the first twenty-four sonatas was given an alphabetical feminine name (e.g., *Abella*, *Baccha*, *Cadmea* . . . *Xantippea*, *Yvana*, *Zacchantea*). Many of these represent historical and mythological characters; for instance, Xantippea and Dejanira respectively were the wives of Socrates and Heracles. Several more sonatas are titled after ancient Roman cities, such as Abella and Ebura. Others are named for Roman festivals, such as Quinquatria, a holiday of Minerva. Most of the twenty-four titles appear in Pliny the Elder's "Natural History," but if there is a further connection between the names, it has not yet been discovered. It is possible that Pezel, lowborn but eager to demonstrate his education, picked names from antiquity at random.

The alphabetical nature of the titles is itself extremely unusual. While character pieces were popular in France during the high Baroque, and they appear occasionally in Italy and even in rare cases in Germany (Erasmus Widmann and Georg Engelmann both have volumes of dance music with fanciful names), this is perhaps the only collection of "alphabetical" character pieces in the entirety of music history. (Johann Schickhardt's *L'Alphabet de la Musique*, a set of sonatas in all twenty-four keys that followed J.S. Bach's *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*, contains no reference to the alphabet except in its title.)

The "Alphabet Sonatas" are written in a style common to late-seventeenth-century Germany. They essentially consist of rudimentary tonality in proto-movements, generally alternating between homophony and imitative counterpoint, each ending with a coda that

recapitulates the opening motive. This cyclical conclusion to a sonata was not rare in this era, and other examples can be found by composers including Schmelzer, Bertali, and Rosenmüller.

However, the collection does not end with the "Alphabet Sonatas." A massive 448-measure *Ciacona* closes *Opus Musicum Sonatarum*, using two distinct alternating bass patterns: a twenty-four-measure bass for *concertato* passages and a twenty-measure bass for *ripieno* passages. This is one of the longest and most complex grounds written prior to J. S. Bach's organ *Passacaglia*, BWV 582, and violin *Ciacona* from BWV 1004. Pezel's decision to end a thematic collection with a single non-thematic piece was not unusual, and there were many precedents; for instance, Biber's *Rosencranz-Sonaten*—fifteen violin sonatas in *scordatura* tuning, each programmed to symbolize a different station of the cross—end with an unrelated solo violin *Passacaglia*.

Opus Musicum Sonatarum is also remarkable for its length and the size of the ensemble for which it calls. During this period in Germany, melody/bass and trio sonatas were far more common than larger multi-voice instrumental pieces, which were typically isolated single-movement compositions and not found within collections. Some of the largest collections of sonatas include Biber's *Sonatae tam Aris* (twelve sonatas *a* 2–8), Muffat's *Floregium Primum* and *Secundum* (seven and eight sonatas respectively, all *a* 5), and Schmelzer's *Sacro-Profanus Conventus Musicus* (thirteen sonatas *a* 2–8), but volumes of this scale are rarities. *Opus Musicum Sonatarum* (twenty-five sonatas *a* 6, some of them longer than the longest of the works listed above) might be the largest extant work of secular music—with regard to number of movements, lengths of movements, and orchestrational size—published in seventeenth-century Germany.

For further information about Johann Pezel and *Opus Musicum Sonatarum*, or to download free copies of scores and parts to any or all of these sonatas, visit us at www.acronymensemble.com.

—Kivie Cahn-Lipman

ACRONYM

Edwin Huizinga, Beth Wenstrom; violin
Adriane Post; violin and viola
Karina Schmitz, Kyle Miller; viola
Paul Dwyer; violoncello

Loren Ludwig; treble and bass viols
Kivie Cahn-Lipman; tenor and bass viols
Doug Balliett; bass viol and violone
Simon Martyn-Ellis; theorbo and guitar
Ben Katz; harpsichord and organ

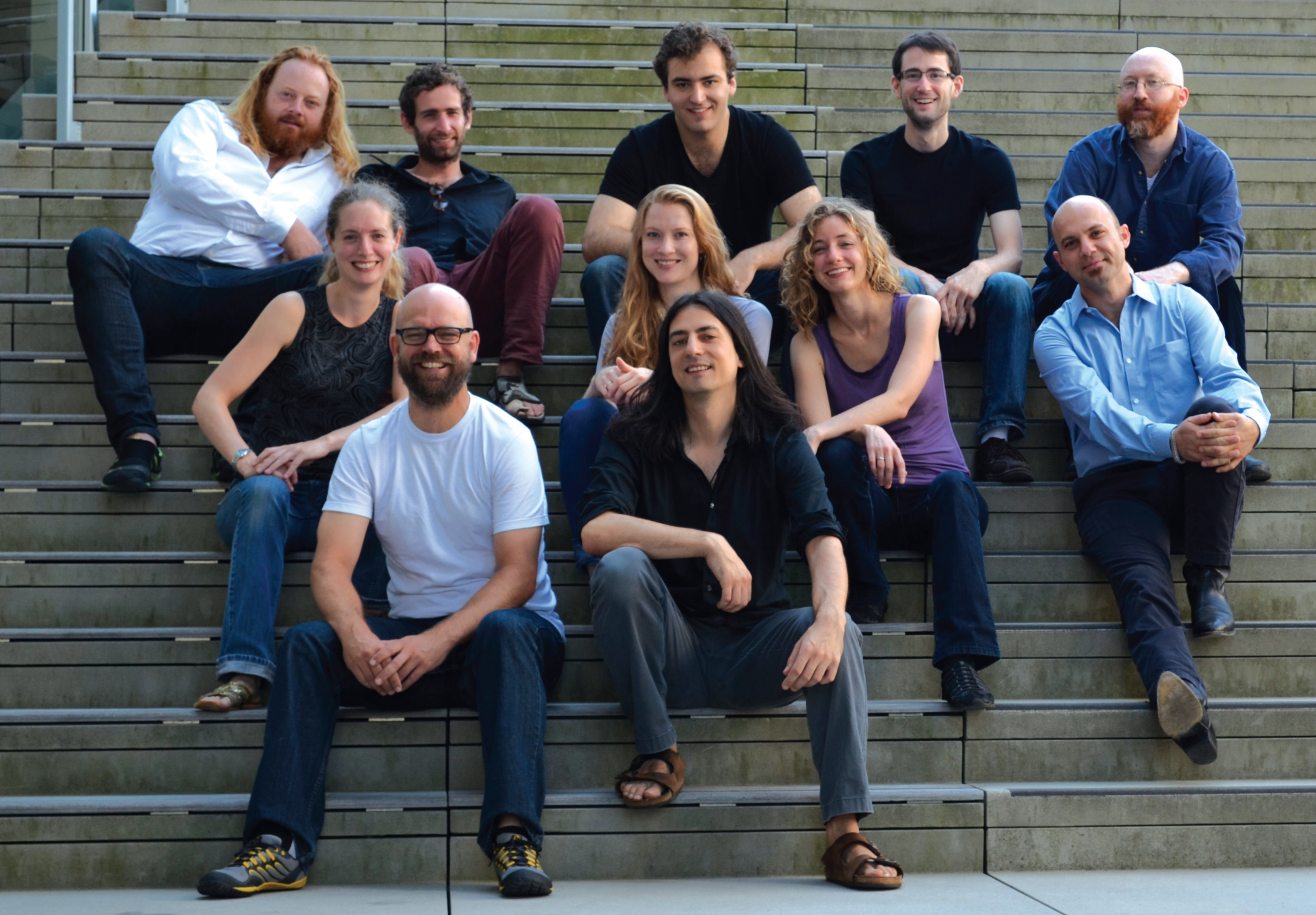
ACRONYM formed in Summer 2012 for the present recording. The eleven-member string band is devoted to resurrecting music of the past by giving modern premieres of long-lost works by forgotten composers. Our second CD, instrumental sonatas by Antonio Bertali, can also be found on Olde Focus Recordings. Upcoming projects include concert tours of Pezel and Bertali, as well as the first recordings and modern performances of music by Samuel Capricornus, Johann Rosenmüller, and more. If you enjoyed this disc, please consider making a tax-deductible donation to ACRONYM Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. ACRONYM is a musician-run ensemble, so the players themselves—all of whom participated in this recording *pro bono*—will receive 100% of your contribution. www.acronymensemble.com

Thank You

ACRONYM would like to extend a huge thank you to David Schneider and the Amherst College Music Department for generously loaning us Buckley Recital Hall and a harpsichord for a week, and to Ted Keyes for being our on-site go-to savior. Thanks to Grant Moss, Bob Eisenstein, and the Five-College Early Music Program for the use of their continuo organ. Thanks to Dr. Alan M. Corn for translating the dedication from Latin. Thanks to Josette Henschel and Joan Saperstan for renting us their beautiful house for the week, complete with sheep, llamas, hammock, and hot tub. Thanks to Tanya Kevorkian, Charles Brewer, Arne Spohr, Mary Frandsen, and Bruce McClung for their assistance with research. Thanks to Raphael Atlas and Sarah Lodico for their aid in transcribing the music from manuscript. Thanks to Maro Elliott for helping to guarantee we all had parts from which to play, as well as for proofing the liner notes. And special thanks to our helpers, Julia Shim and Ellen Massey, for food deliveries and for making sure we were always nourished with green things.

Credits

Recorded in Buckley Recital Hall, Amherst College, August 23–25, 2012
Engineered and mixed by Ryan Streber of Oktaven Audio
Produced and edited by Kivie Cahn-Lipman and Ryan Streber
Additional editing by Jeff Hoffman and Loren Ludwig
Photo by Ryan Streber
Graphic design by Marc Wolf
Art extracted from *Alphabeto in Sogno* (“Dream Alphabet”) by Giuseppe Maria Mitelli (1683)



Top Row: Edwin Huizinga, Doug Balliett, Paul Dwyer, Kyle Miller, Elliot Figg; *Middle Row:* Karina Schmitz, Adriane Post, Beth Wenstrom, Loren Ludwig; *Bottom Row:* Simon Martyn-Ellis, Kivie Cahn-Lipman

