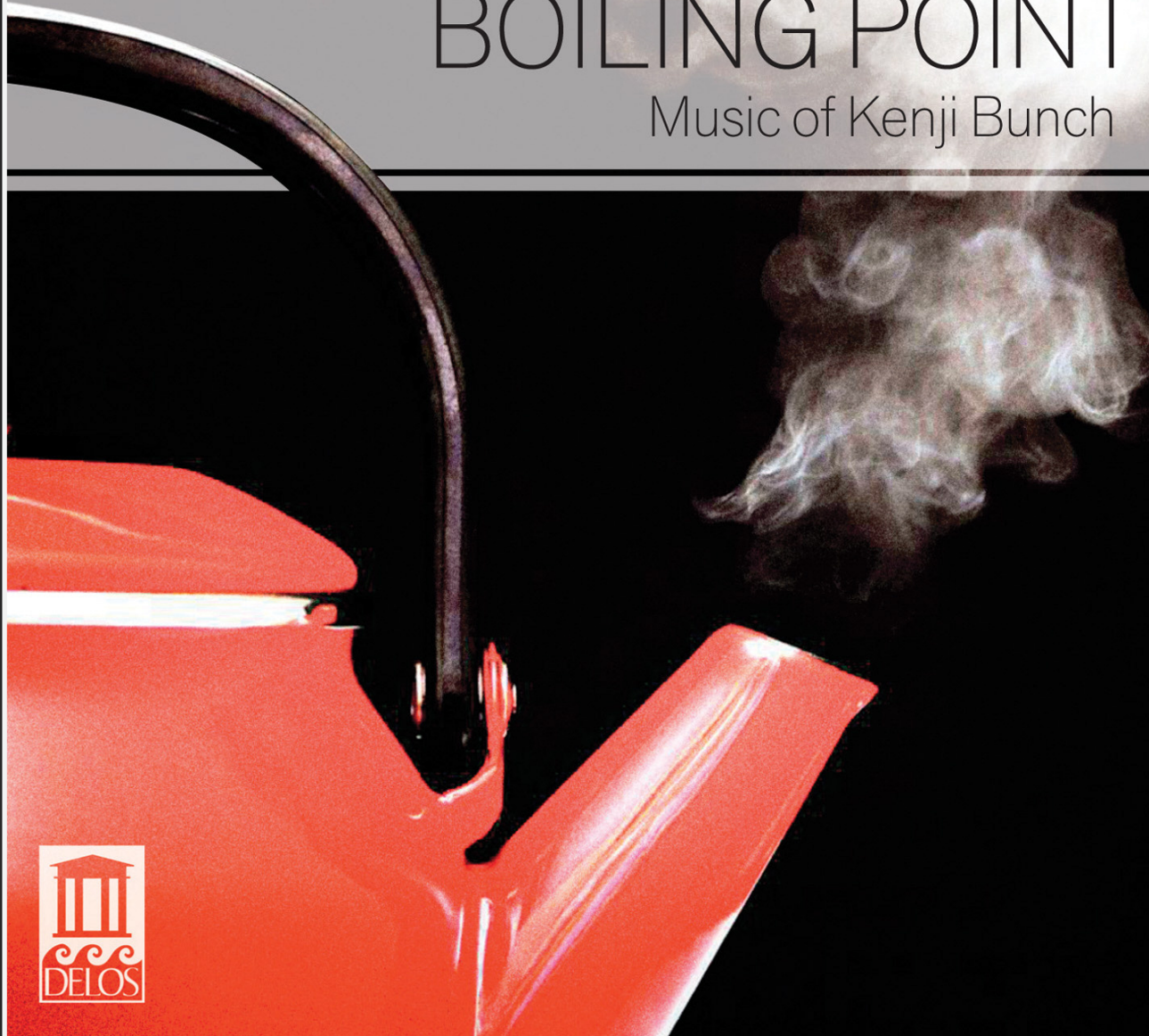


ALIAS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

BOILING POINT

Music of Kenji Bunch



LC04487

DE 3430

A L I A S C H A M B E R E N S E M B L E

BOILING POINT

Music of Kenji Bunch

1-5: String Circle (2005)

I. Lowdown (4:29)

II. Shuffle Step (3:11)

III. Ballad (7:34)

IV. Porch Picking (3:36)

V. Overdrive (3:36)

Zeneba Bowers, Jeremy Williams, violins; Christopher Farrell, Kenji Bunch, violas; Matt Walker, cello

6: Drift (2006) (10:28)

Lee C. Levine, clarinet; Christopher Farrell, viola; Roger Wiesmeyer, piano

7: 26.2 (2012) (11:41)

Zeneba Bowers, violin; Christopher Farrell, viola; Matt Walker, cello; Leslie Norton, French Horn

8: Luminaria (2001) (8:17)

Alison Gooding, violin; Licia Jaskunas, harp

9: Boiling Point (2002) (6:36)

*Jeremy Williams, Zeneba Bowers, violins; Christopher Farrell, viola; Matt Walker, cello; Joel Reist, bass;
Todd London, drum set*

Total Playing Time: 59:29



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ALIAS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE



KENJI BUNCH

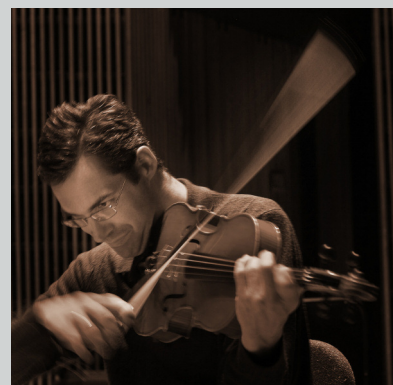
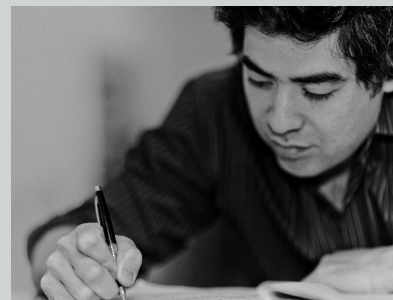


Photo: Stephanie Hudson

ALIAS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Photo: John Partipilo

ALBUM CREDITS

Recorded in Turner Hall, Blair School of Music, Vanderbilt University
and Quad Studios, Nashville TN

Engineered, Edited, and Mixed by: Kevin Edlin

Mastered by: Jim Demain, Yes Master Studios

Produced by: D. Wilson Ochoa

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Foreword

from Pulitzer Prize-winning
composer Kevin Puts:

Composers today would like to believe we live in a time when the stylistic battles have already been fought for us by our predecessors, that “anything goes,” that one can truly write from the heart without fear of elitist backlash. I have not found this to be true. I believe it still takes extraordinary bravery to speak from the heart, to shed unnecessary complexity and avoid opportunistic adherence to current trend.

Kenji Bunch is one of very few composers alive today who has this courage. He is a consummate musician, a true “performer’s composer” with an uncanny feel for the dynamic of the concert hall. He can write effortlessly in a myriad of styles and languages, which he is able to juxtapose with elegance and humor. I am always carried away by the infectious energy of his faster music, by its impeccable timing and virtuosity. But the quieter, more intimate moments are among the most touching, beautiful and genuine of any music being written today.

— *Kevin Puts*

Composer’s Preface:

This is a collection of some of my favorite and most deeply personal chamber works of the past decade, which I could not be more excited, honored, and grateful to have ALIAS Chamber Ensemble present on this recording - my heartfelt thanks to Zeneba Bowers for her vision and tireless work to make this possible. I’m equally indebted to the incredible talent and dedication of producer Wilson Ochoa, engineer Kevin Edlin, and Kira Bielfield and the DELOS Productions team.

Beyond that, I’d like to thank Bill Holab, Kevin Puts, Elizabeth Cecil, Mark Woolman Horner, ASCAP, Young Concert Artists, Inc., Nurse Kaya, and New York Road Runners. It goes without saying that I could not have written any of this music, had it not been for the efforts and patience of my music teachers - I humbly thank all of you. An immeasurable thank you for my parents and my brother for letting me grow up with my imagination intact. And lastly, to my wife Monica, my daughter Emmaline, and my dog Coffee, who are my inspiration and greatest supporters. This is for you!



Composer's Notes

String Circle (2005):

String Circle refers to the continuum of history and tradition that string instruments offer us. Our country is particularly rich in a variety of approaches to string playing, so each of the work's five movements offers tribute to a particular idiom of American music.

The first movement, "Lowdown," recalls the uniquely raw, driving music of "Old-Time Appalachian Fiddling." Played with droning pedal tones and no vibrato, this music is typically static harmonically, but very active in rhythmic variety and inflection. From a mysterious opening, a theme emerges, travels between the voices and ends up the subject of a five-part canon that ends the movement.

A scherzo, "Shuffle Step," follows, paying homage to Texas swing, specifically the close-harmony fiddle choirs of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. "Ballad," the third movement is a setting of the folk song "Wayfaring Stranger," interrupted by an ascending line in the first viola, gradually imitated by the others at different rates, creating a wash of tenuous, ever-changing harmonies suggesting the ascension to heaven to which the song refers.

Next comes "Porch Picking," a second scherzo played entirely pizzicato, with twangy slides between pitches evoking the unique sounds of the banjo. Amid the plucking, the second viola begins to strum, suggesting another instrument - the 'ukelele.

The work ends with "Overdrive," a fast, furious dance that up-

dates the musical influences from folk to funk, celebrating the versatility of the string instruments and their continuing relevance in music of a more contemporary vernacular.

In a work full of tributes, one more deserves mention. Translating folk music into a concert work is certainly nothing new, and one cannot discuss this field without mentioning the giant of both 20th century composition and musicology, Béla Bartók. The arch movement structure (fugal first movement, scherzo, slow, dramatic center, pizzicato scherzo, and fast dance) is modeled directly after Bartók's seminal 4th String Quartet. Additionally, the last movement employs, as a thematic device, the Fibonacci series, a numerical procedure often used by Bartók.

Drift (2006):

Occasionally, I lose good compositional ideas, either because I neglected to write them down, or they came to me as I was falling asleep. In either case, they succumbed to the inevitable erosion of my memory. Subtitled "An Eventual Lullaby," *Drift* is a memorial to these "lost" ideas, and in a more general way, a metaphor for the process of grief - the struggle with, and ultimate acceptance of loss.

The clarinet slowly unravels a partially improvised melody, with the viola trailing, hesitantly recalling the material by ear. This process of one instrument introducing music while another tries to "catch" it is central to the work. Here, the inaccuracies of memory and perception are used to develop melodic material, symbolizing our perpetual but ultimately fruitless struggle

to accurately preserve the transient moments we experience.

This “memory game” trails off into passages of dream music; the unfiltered, unorganized creativity of the unconscious mind. Eventually, a lilting lullaby emerges and subsides until it vaporizes into a haze of viola harmonics, barely audible clarinet trills and strains of a music box in the upper register of the piano, reconciling the notion of letting memories gradually drift away.

26.2 (2012):

As many runners know, 26.2 is the distance in miles of an official marathon - a distance my wife and I have run three times together. This work for horn and string trio is a tone poem depicting our experience running our first race - the legendary NYC marathon.

We begin in darkness, as the runners rise before dawn on a frigid fall morning to assemble in Staten Island. The sun gradually emerges and begins to thaw them out. The pre-race cocktail of anxiety, excitement, fear, and exhilaration explodes into the initial burst of energy; the glorious first mile crossing the Verrazano Bridge into Brooklyn.

The next few miles fly by as a joyous energy sweeps up our pair of runners. What follows is a series of rapidly shifting musical quotes. This represents the hundreds of musical performances the runners encounter along the course - including salsa, heavy metal, Scottish bagpipes, and sports anthems.

Abruptly interrupting this quodlibet is a starkly contrasting slow Jewish waltz, suggesting the sudden foray into the heavenly Hasidic neighborhood of South Williamsburg, where the raucous cheers and blaring music are replaced by silently cu-

rious stares. And just as abruptly, we’re on to another mile and another neighborhood.

A heroic bagpipe melody underscores the victorious processional onto Manhattan’s 1st Avenue. The glory is short lived, though, as the runners approach the dreaded phenomenon known as “the wall”- the threshold at which both body and spirit begin to rapidly give out. Recalling the optimism of the start, the commitment to the months of training as well as to each other, and with the energy of the crowd now carrying them, our two runners find the reserve and the resolve to finally reach the finish line.

This work was written for the Alias Chamber Ensemble. It’s dedicated to my Alias friends, and to anyone who has gone the distance.

Luminaria (2001):

In the fall of 2001, I was one of many volunteer performers at St. Paul’s Chapel in lower Manhattan, playing restful, soothing music every day at noon for the relief and construction workers using the space as a staging area during cleanup of the WTC disaster. Once, I was invited to present my original music, but I couldn’t think of anything appropriate, and it seemed an awkward situation to promote my own work. However, the notion stayed with me, and months later I wrote this introspective, meditative work for harp and violin with that experience in mind.

I drew inspiration from the Mexican/Pueblo tradition of *luminaria*: votive candles enclosed in colored paper wrappings. I was intrigued by the fragile, tenuous combination of fire and

paper, the intricate subtleties of a flickering flame within the simplicity of the glowing paper wrap, and the idea of an inner light still visible and illuminating to the outside world. The muted violin suggests the covered lantern, and the trills and whispering tremolos of the harp recall the flickering light.

Boiling Point (2002):

In the early 2000s, I was the violist of the Nurse Kaya String Quartet. Created by bassist/ composer Tim Kiah, this group of friends presented our original music for amplified string quartet with drums and bass in an experimental, post-classical context. *Boiling Point* was one such work, and was inspired by the quite disparate influences of comic book graphics, the music of Morton Feldman, and my whistling teakettle.

Notated as a graphic score expressed in the stylized lettering and graphics of action comics, and using these design elements to suggest interpretation of the improvised material, the music is built in Feldman-esque repeated cells - though the rock-influenced grooves and dynamics are light years away from Feldman's unique sound world.

As a study in the contained and ultimately violently exploding energy of a teakettle, *Boiling Point* follows the development of water as it gradually escalates to a boil. The work is performed with a live teakettle on stage, and its duration is contingent on the amount of time the water takes to boil.

— Kenji Bunch

Handwritten musical score for *Boiling Point*. The score includes staves for violin, viola, and bass. It features various dynamics such as *pp*, *p cresc.*, *mp*, and *pp cresc.*. Performance instructions include "continue...", "gradually return to last tim. groove...", and "continue during DRUM SOLO!". The score is marked with "5x" and "A".

Handwritten musical score for *Boiling Point*, featuring graphic elements and stylized text. The score includes staves for violin, viola, and bass. It features various dynamics such as *pp*, *mp cresc.*, and *pp cresc.*. Performance instructions include "continue...", "gradually return to last tim. groove...", "continue during DRUM SOLO!", and "continue during DRUM SOLO!". The score is marked with "20 sec." and "PLAY 2X". Stylized text includes "SLOW SLOW GRASSANO", "THE HELICOPTER!", and "ROLLING BOIL...". A large graphic element at the bottom right is labeled "WHISTLE!".

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Biography

Kenji Bunch has emerged as one of the most engaging, prolific, and influential American composers of his generation. Drawing from his classical background to combine expressive lyricism with elements of improvisation, the avant-garde, and American vernacular traditions, his music helps to define an intriguing New American movement in concert music.



Mr. Bunch's genre-defying music has been performed by over forty orchestras, presented in premiere venues on six continents, regularly broadcast on radio worldwide, recorded on numerous labels, and has been featured in documentary films, television, and in numerous collaborations with dance and theater.

Mr. Bunch maintains an active performing career, and is widely recognized for his own groundbreaking works for viola. A versatile musician with a deep interest in vernacular American music traditions and improvisation, he also plays bluegrass fiddle, sings, and is a frequent collaborator with many prominent rock, jazz, folk, world, and experimental artists.

A native of Portland, Oregon, Mr. Bunch currently lives in Brooklyn, NY with his wife, pianist Monica Ohuchi, their daughter Emaline, and their rescued pit bull mix Coffee.

ABOUT ALIAS

ALIAS Chamber Ensemble is proud to present this, its second recording of great chamber music. The ensemble's first CD, (Hilos: The music of Gabriela Lena Frank) received a Grammy nomination in 2011 for Best Small Ensemble Performance.

ALIAS is a nonprofit chamber ensemble dedicated to an innovative repertoire, artistic excellence, and a desire to give back to the community. ALIAS adopts three nonprofit partners each season, and shares the spotlight with one nonprofit at every series performance.

This "spotlight" nonprofit partner has the opportunity to share its message with the audience, and receives 100 percent of the proceeds from that concert...no strings attached.

Since its inception in 2002, ALIAS has presented thirteen World Premieres of new music, as well as performing hundreds of familiar and unfamiliar works from the past four centuries. The ensemble has collaborated with the Nashville Symphony, Nashville Ballet, and Nashville Opera. Its wide-ranging repertoire brings audiences a mix of chamber music that cannot be heard anywhere else.

ALIAS Chamber Ensemble would like to thank the following for their generous support of this recording:

Bill and Shelley Alexander, Avenue Bank, Eileen Beehan, Bruce and Carol Bowers, Zeneba Bowers & Matt Walker, Georgeann Burns, JoAnn and Dan Church, Frank and Carol Daniels, Dee Doochin, Eaton Corporation, Elan Hair/Elan Skin, Chris Farrell and Kathryn Beasley, Forest Home Media, Hal Hardin, Lisa and Bill Headley, Judith Hodges, John and Kate Kissingford, Liberty Party Rental, McLemore Auction Company LLC, Metro Nashville Arts Commission, Mix 92.9, Nashville Arts Magazine, David Piston, Jim Robert & Gary Stewart, Mickey & Kathleen Sparkman, Tennessee Arts Commission, Kathleen van Bergen, Dr. Jan van Eys, Village Real Estate Svcs., Stacy Widelitz, Roger Wiesmeyer, Harold and Pamela Williams, York & Friends Fine Art.

THE MUSICIANS OF ALIAS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Zeneba Bowers, ALIAS' Artistic Director, earned her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Eastman School of Music. Zeneba has served as concertmaster of Charleston Spoleto Festival, Festival dei Due Mondi (Spoleto, Italy), and the New World Symphony. She joined the Nashville Symphony in 1999 and became Assistant Principal Second Violin in 2001. Zeneba founded ALIAS in 2002; the group quickly became a major element of Nashville's classical music scene, and garnered a Grammy nomination in 2011 for Best Small Ensemble Performance on its debut CD, "Hilos", which Zeneba also co-produced.

Arlington, Texas, native **Chris Farrell** joined the Nashville Symphony viola section in 1999. Previously, he was a member of the Knoxville Symphony. Chris holds a Bachelor

of Music degree from the University of North Texas and a Master of Music degree from Indiana University.

Violinist **Alison Gooding** received her Bachelor of Music degree from Florida State University, where she studied with Karen Clarke and Julian Ross. She received her Master of Music degree from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, where she studied with Dorothy DeLay and Kurt Sassmannshaus. Currently a member of the Nashville Symphony, she is an active teacher throughout the Nashville area.

Licia Jaskunas has been principal harpist with the Nashville Symphony since 1998. Previously, she played with the New World Symphony and the Utah Festival Opera Company. She studied at Indiana University and the Eastman School of Music and was winner of the American Harp Society's National Competition in 1987. She teaches privately and at Belmont University and Trevecca College.

Lee Levine has recorded chamber music for the Gasparo Label, orchestral music on the Naxos Label, and popular and commercial music for many of Nashville's top producers. She recently retired from a 30-year orchestral career, which included positions as principal clarinetist with the Bogota Philharmonic and the Nashville Symphony, but she continues to be an active chamber musician and recording artist.

Percussionist **Todd London** teaches at Belmont University and performs regularly with a number of ensembles. Todd holds a Master's degree in Percussion Performance from the University of Georgia, and a Bachelor's degree in Commercial Music Performance from Belmont University. As a composer, Todd has written music for such shows as "Guiding Light" and "As The World Turns."



Photo: Amy Dickerson

Bassist **Joel Reist** joined the Nashville Symphony in 1998, and has served as principal bass since 2003. His teachers include Paul Ellison and Anthony Bianco, with whom he studied at Rice University and Carnegie Mellon University, respectively. Joel was a member of the New World Symphony and has performed with the symphonies of Houston and San Antonio, the Aspen Music Festival, the Spoleto USA Festival, and Utah Festival Opera. Joel is a faculty member of Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music.

Cellist **Matt Walker** was a founding member of ALIAS Chamber Ensemble; he served as the group's executive director from 2009-2011, and he co-produced ALIAS' Grammy-nominated recording, "Hilos." A cellist with the Nashville Symphony since 1999, Matt has also appeared in ALIAS concerts playing bass and guitar. He is also a composer whose own music has been heard in the UK and Canada as well as locally and nationally, performed by ALIAS and, most recently, by Yo Yo Ma.

After 19 years of wandering, **Roger Wiesmeyer** came home to play English Horn in the Nashville Symphony in the fall of 2001. Before settling here, he received a Bachelor's degree from the Curtis Institute of Music and played in the Pittsburgh and San Francisco symphonies. Roger also plays oboe and piano and finds music a constant source of delight and solace.

Violinist **Jeremy Williams** is from Albany, NY. He joined The Nashville Symphony in 1998. He holds Bachelor's degrees in music and psychology from the University of Michigan and a Master's degree in music from Carnegie Mellon University where he studied with Andres Cardenes. Jeremy has played with many orchestras. As an educator, he leads a string quartet which performs programs for young people in Tennessee schools.