



Lara Downes
Love at Last



LOVE AT LAST

Jaroslav Ježek (1906, Czechoslovakia - 1942, USA)

1 Dawn | Svítá + (arr. Jeremy Siskind) 1. 29

J.S. Bach (1685 - 1750, Germany)

2 Sleepers Awake | Wachet Auf + (arr. Ignaz Friedman) 3. 21

Debbie Friedman (1951-2011, USA)

3 Laugh at All My Dreams +(arr. Jeremy Siskind) 2. 36

Margaret Bonds (1913 - 1972, USA)

4 I Believe: Credo No. 2 (arr. Lara Downes) 2. 35

Clarice Assad (b. 1978, Brazil)

5 A World of Change* 3. 22

Gabriel Kahane (b. 1981, Los Angeles)

6 Little Love+ 3. 16

Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828, Austria)

7 Believe in Spring | Frühlingsglaube + (arr. August Horn) 3. 58

Iván Enrique Rodríguez (b. 1990, Puerto Rico)

8 Tree Of Life* 3. 20

Karen Tanaka (b. 1961, Japan)

9 Earth 2. 14

Nyokabi Kariūki (b. 1998, Kenya)

10 It Only Ever Rains in November* 3. 19

deVon Russell Gray (b. USA)

11 Even This Laughter; Even Your Tears* 4. 26

Jimmy López Bellido (b. 1978, Peru)

12 By Loving You* (arr. for solo piano by López Bellido) 2. 22

Sean Hickey (b. 1970, USA)

13 Fluid* 3. 48

Calliope Tsoupaki (b. 1963, Greece)

14 Meeting Point* 2. 45

Timo Andres (b. 1985, USA)

15 Parting Friends* 3. 23

Sammy Fain (1902-1989, USA)

16 I'll Be Seeing You+ (arr. Mariel Mayz) 2. 43

Dobrinka Tabakova (b. 1980, Bulgaria)

17 Simple Prayer for Complex Times* 5. 27

Patricio Molina (b. 1993, Chile)

18 Blessing* 3. 20

Vijay Iyer (b. 1971, USA)

19 Crown thy Good* 5. 20

Milad Yousufi (b. 1995, Afghanistan)

20 Healer* 2. 56

Juhi Bansal (b. 1984, Hong Kong)

21 Mirror The Stars* 1. 27

Hooshyar Khayam (b. 1970, Iran)

22 Bright Night* 2. 51

Valentin Silvestrov (b. 1937, Ukraine)

23 Lullaby 2. 42

Traditional

24 Amazing Grace+ (arr. Shawn E. Okpebholo) 2. 58

Lara Downes

25 Audio Commentary 2. 23

Total playing time: 78. 32

Lara Downes, piano

* world premiere recording

+ world premiere recording of this arrangement



*Laugh at all my dreams, my dearest
Laugh and I repeat anew
That I still believe in man
As I still believe in you.
Let the time be dark with hatred
I believe in years beyond
Love at last shall bind all peoples
In an everlasting bond.*

Shaul Tchernichovsky was a very young man when he wrote that poem in Odessa in 1894. The turn of the twentieth century would bring waves of brutal violence against his Jewish community in Ukraine, revolution in Russia, war throughout Europe and the entire world. A time dark with hatred. By the time he died in Jerusalem in 1943, he had seen, in his seven decades, the worst crimes and atrocities that human beings can inflict upon each other. But he'd also borne witness to uprising, resistance, resilience — evidence of the greatest possible human courage, compassion and transformation. I hope that through it all, he held onto his youthful belief in his fellow man, in our capacity to love each other and for our

love to someday save us, at last. Here I am, writing these words in October of 2022, our own time dark with disaster and destruction — Russian missiles raining down on Ukraine; terror in Iran; an Ebola outbreak in Uganda; the worst mass killing in Thailand's history; the everyday horror of American gun violence here at home. And everywhere on the planet, lives displaced and destroyed by a relentless cadence of hurricanes and floods, drought and fire. In such darkness, the only light is love; the only choice is to believe in each other and in the brighter promise of years beyond.

The composers on this album are my friends and fellow travelers, all of us finding our way together in a world of change. They shared their music with me when I needed it most, a lifeline to connection and community. And joining us here are our musical ancestors — Bach, Bonds, Schubert — with testaments of their own faith and hope in troubled times. This music expresses love and loss, light and darkness, renewal and redemption. It comes

from many different voices, united across generations, continents and cultures through stubborn belief in the possibility of humanity, brotherhood, peace, and compassion, and in the everlasting power of love.

Lara Downes

THE MUSIC

DAWN (SVÍTÁ)

This song was played every morning on the radio in Prague during the Nazi occupation — a coded message of resistance, a reminder to the Czech people that light would come again out of the darkness. Imagine that, to wake up each day, in a time of such tragedy, to find a little hope in a simple tune. I played this piece in a concert at the Czech Embassy in Washington, DC some years ago, and I'll never forget how I looked out to find most of the audience dissolved in tears of shared memory, the shared longing and love of home — just from hearing this simple little tune.

Lara Downes

SLEEPERS AWAKE (WACHET AUF)

At the turn of the 17th century, the pastor of a small German town watched over his congregation as an epidemic swept through his community, leaving death and despair in its wake. He wrote a hymn urging believers to wake from their sleep and hold up their lamps at midnight — to usher in a brighter day with the radiance of communal light. His hymn has offered comfort and hope over four centuries. It was repurposed along the way by J.S. Bach in his chorale cantata *Sleepers Awake*, arranged here by the Polish pianist Ignaz Friedman (1882-1948), a refugee from Hitler's Europe who must have found his own measure of solace in this old melody.

LD

LAUGH AT ALL MY DREAMS

The music of the progressive, pacifist, feminist folksinger/songwriter Debbie Friedman was ubiquitous in American synagogues in the 1980s, and I remember singing this song of hers in our youth group at Temple Emanuel in San Francisco. My Reform Jewish

upbringing echoed the message of this song: to believe in the power of love, even despite the overwhelming evidence of hate that was still within living memory. My generation was taught with urgent insistence never to forget the horrors of the Holocaust; to imagine, from the vantage point of our sunny California childhood, the utterly unimaginable darkness that had stolen the lives of grandparents and great-grandparents, that had severed our ties to “the old country” and shorn so many branches from our family trees. Some of my earliest musical mentors, including my teacher Adolph Baller, were Holocaust survivors; they taught me that music can be your lifeline, the only thing you take with you when you flee in the night, when your world turns upside down, when everything else is lost — your unextinguishable glimmer of light and love.

LD

I BELIEVE: CREDO, NO. 2

At the turn of the 20th century, the Black sociologist, historian and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois imagined a world that defied

the realities of Jim Crow America. In his prose poem *Credo* he stated his belief that all people deserve “the space to stretch their arms and their souls; the right to breathe and the right to vote, the freedom to choose their friends, enjoy the sunshine and ride on the railroads, uncursed by color; thinking, dreaming, working as they will.” Sixty years later, Margaret Bonds found inspiration in his words, and wrote a piece of music full of pure passion and soaring beauty, even as violence raged and fires burned across America, as the Civil Rights movement fought on for the promise of freedom and equality, still unfulfilled, but still worth believing in.

LD

A WORLD OF CHANGE

This piece reflects on global transformation, destruction, and renewal, through the metaphor of water, the element without which nothing we know could survive. From the cycles of the tides to the natural bridgeways of our waterways, we depend on the flow of the oceans and rivers that connect

us. And today, we also navigate the cyber waters of our interconnected world, a network that questions our readiness for a world where thoughts and free speech are held tight in compressed bottles living inside imaginary clouds.

Clarice Assad

LITTLE LOVE

This song first appeared as a part of Gabriel Kahane’s album *Book of Travelers*, a musical account of his 8,980-mile railway journey in the aftermath of the 2016 election, an attempt to rediscover and celebrate our collective humanity in the face of deep political and cultural divisions. Gabriel made this beautiful piano arrangement for me at my request, a song without words that holds within it the echoes of his tender, intimate story of abiding, abounding love:

*A long gray silence had ambled down the
coast*

*You drew in sand all the things we’d miss the
most*

*Little love, little love
I hope we die here when we’re old*

LD

BELIEVE IN SPRING (FRÜHLINGSGLAUBE)

When Franz Schubert wrote this song, he was 25 years old, and experiencing the onset of the illnesses that would bring his life to its end in six short years. Maybe it’s not surprising that he chose to set a text (by the poet Johann Ludwig Uhland) that speaks of the beauty of spring’s blooming, but also warns of the season’s inevitable yielding to decay and frost — a reminder of the fragile and ephemeral nature of beauty in this world.

*The world grows fairer each day;
We cannot know what is still to come;
The flowering knows no end.
The deepest, most distant valley is in flower.
Now, poor heart, forget your torment.
Now all must change.*

LD

TREE OF LIFE

During the summer of 2022, I had the blessing of meeting the amazing pianist — and even better human being — Lara Downes. We met at a coffee shop in Santa Cruz, CA and talked about many things: music (of course), but also representation, social justice, our place as people of color in classical music. We also talked about our stories, where we came from, how we ended up where we were. Between sips of coffee under the summer-beachy sun of Santa Cruz, we synchronized over a metaphor: “We are like trees, and people are like leaves, branches, and roots in our life, none less important than the other, but each fulfilling a time in our lives, time that sometimes ends, and sometimes continues.” From that idea sprouted *Tree of Life*, a piano piece that tells the story of a tree. Its branches may fall after droughts and storms, or may be cut down by someone following either cruel or noble motivations. Its leaves, in the never-ending progress of time, fall or are blown away. Withal, the tree never ceases to keep communion with its roots, the anchors that

keep it grounded, the structures that support it, and the system that collects the nutrients for its subsistence. All these processes, vital as they are, occur with a plethora of emotional shades. From agonizing to the exhilarating, from the enraging to the joyous, from the confusing to the lucid, all together form who the tree is, similar to us. This piece is my attempt to etch the sonic account of those emotions, how they are connected, how they need each other, and how they all culminate in the same purpose — to live.

Ivan Enrique Rodriguez

Postscript

When I recorded Ivan’s wonderful piece at Adam Abeshouse’s studio in upper Westchester, the final chords were joined by a chorus of birds outside the window, flying in and alighting on this tree of life. We left their songs in the recording because they were clearly meant to be there

LD

EARTH

Earth is the last piece of Karen Tanaka’s suite

Our Planet Earth, a set of pieces written as a message to children to love the beauty of our planet and the animals that inhabit it, in the hope that the next generation will develop safe and clean energy, and work to protect the natural environment. The future is in the hands of the children. May they do a better job than we have of loving our earth.

LD

IT ONLY EVER RAINS IN NOVEMBER

This piece is a youthful reflection of the autumnal theme of change and transition, written just after my moving from Nairobi, Kenya, to the United States. I was experiencing a series of “firsts”: my first semester of college, my first time experiencing the season of Fall in New York; and the piece itself, too, was the first piece of music I wrote to completion in college. As I wrote the work, I reflected on watching the colorful leaves evolve and tumble; the swaying of the warm versus the cold; the light, and of course, the rain — but more largely, the complicated feelings of learning a new place: the excitement for the

new experiences, underscored by a nostalgia for the warmth of home.

Nyokabi Kariuki

EVEN THIS LAUGHTER; EVEN YOUR TEARS

In 2016, I asked deVon to transcribe for me some magical and mesmerizing improvisations of his that I’d heard on his SoundCloud. It took him four years — a somewhat painful if transformational process of translating the ephemeral into the permanent. When he sent the pieces to me in 2020, it was with this note: “These versions are heavy with the woes of these last few years. What a world what a world. When you lay hands upon the keyboard to breathe life into these little pieces, I hope that love is coursing through your veins. I hope that for you, I hope that for me. I want these pieces to be open and honest, first to you. Beyond that I trust that the touch and emotion you put into these pieces and the moments you create will move someone. We only need one. One is enough.”

LD

BY LOVING YOU

On June 22, 1839, Robert Schumann wrote a letter to his beloved Clara where he expressed his enormous joy at their engagement. It is a moving testament of Robert's love for Clara, awash in praise and filled with vivid references to the summer blossoms and the promise of young love. The lyrics of this song are taken from the letter's final paragraph: "*I should like to set a crown upon your head, but can only fall at your feet and look up to you with gratitude. By loving you, I love the best the world has to give.*" These words were first brought to my attention by my dear friends Piotr and Maria Orzech, who both felt that they encapsulated their own happiness at being engaged to each other. Therefore, when they got married in the summer of 2009, I found no better way to honor them than by writing a song using the very words that had touched them so deeply, enshrining Robert Schumann's heartfelt declaration of love. The song was premiered at Piotr and Maria's wedding in Poland, in

an intimate and truly memorable ceremony. When Lara approached me with the idea of adapting this song for solo piano, I was genuinely overjoyed. Not only is this work a perfect fit for her album, it also showcases her unmatched ability to express the inexpressible through music. From a technical standpoint, she is able to bring forth the shifting chromatic harmonies and polyphony, even when, at times, the voices are completely intertwined in quasi-baroque fashion. In terms of expression, she is capable of summoning the most profound of feelings, the kind of love that brings out the very best in each of us. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I completed this song exactly 170 years after Robert had penned that letter, on June 22, 2009.

Jimmy López Bellido

FLUID

This piece was written in 2020 for Lara Downes. Uncertainty and tragedy did not bypass my family that year, and my commitment to equity and social justice all but forced its way into our home. *fluid* honors

those who find the bravery to express the gender of their choice in an uncertain – often unloving – world, as well as the many people – essential workers all – who guide and comfort our children in transition while navigating the rocky world of adolescence. The piece counterposes motives from two very different pieces that honor the mystery of water, a rhythmic fragment found in Debussy's epic *La Mer*, and the basic harmonic progression from Joni Mitchell's *River*. The rhythm mostly remains obstinate but the progression expands to include three other chords; when repeated the chords' order is slightly altered. The piece ends in a liquid fog at the extremes of the instrument.

Sean Hickey

MEETING POINT

I composed *Meeting Point* during the Corona crisis months of social distancing and isolation. As the protective measures became less austere, we dared to face each other again and hoped that we would catch up with our lives soon. After all, there is no distance

between us when it comes to music, when it comes to love.

Calliope Tsoupakis

PARTING FRIENDS

I wrote *Parting Friends* for Lara Downes, at her suggestion to write a short piano piece based on an early American tune. I turned to one of my favorite Sacred Harp songs, arranging it over a gentle ostinato, which becomes a downward sequence, and in the second verse, a mensuration canon. Distant fragments of Jane Borthwick's hymn *Come, Labor On* appear over a simpler counterpoint in the coda.

*Farewell, my friends, I'm bound for Canaan,
I'm trav'ling through the wilderness;
Your company has been delightful,
You, who doth leave my mind distressed.
I go away, behind to leave you,
Perhaps never to meet again,
But if we never have the pleasure,
I hope we'll meet on Canaan's land.*

Timo Andres

I'LL BE SEEING YOU

This is a reinterpretation of the popular song best known through recordings by Bing Crosby and Billie Holiday. This version of the song is meant to convey a memory of how I first learned the piece—listening to my grandparents play and sing jazz standards with unconstrained timings, melodic flourishes, differing words—and how I desired to express the song's sentiments on the piano, an instrument that feels like a true extension of my voice. I wrote this piece in March 2020, while positive with Covid-19 and isolated in one room, finding solace at the piano in between fever spikes. This song has personal meaning for many, and has found importance throughout history. It was an anthem during World War II for those serving overseas; and Billie Holiday's recording of the song was the final transmission sent by NASA to the Opportunity rover on Mars when its mission ended in 2019. In this piano setting of the song, I hope listeners can hear the timeless melody sung in a new way, and visualize their own versions of that small cafe, the park across the way, the chestnut tree...

*I'll be seeing you
In all the old familiar places
That this heart of mine embraces
All day through,
In that small cafe
The park across the way
The children's carousel
The chestnut trees
The wishing well,
I'll be seeing you
In every lovely summer's day
In everything that's light and gay
I'll always think of you that way,
I'll find you in the morning sun
And when the night is new
I'll be looking at the moon
But I'll be seeing you*

Mariel Mayz

SIMPLE PRAYER FOR COMPLEX TIMES

During the 14th-17th centuries Europe was ravaged by plagues. The nuns at the St Clare monastery in Coimbra, Portugal wrote a prayer for times of pestilence, which was recited in monasteries throughout medieval Europe and

took on a number of musical variants. Early during the first Covid lockdown in 2020, the BBC invited me to contribute to their Postcards from Composers project, and I chose to make a variation on one of the phrases of the setting of this prayer, by the English composer John Cooke.

This piece was commissioned by Bang on a Can for the Bang on a Can Marathon Live Online August 16, 2020, with support from Rob Mason and RPM Commissioning Fund.

Dobrinka Tabakova

BLESSING

I wrote this piece to tell the story of my life as a DREAMer immigrant. Being an immigrant comes with many challenges that can sometimes be difficult to bear, but acts of kindness from others make the worst of it more bearable. I overcame the difficulties and struggles I faced by receiving acts of kindness from others. These selfless deeds lifted me up to become the man and artist I am today. *Blessing* is dedicated to those who have helped me along the way. The beginning of the piece

is unsettled and continues for a while without finding a resolution. As the piece progresses, the motif transforms into a melody that symbolizes the hope inspired by acts of kindness. The work concludes on a hopeful note, remembering the opening motif transformed through acts of kindness: a blessing.

Patricio Molina

CROWN THY GOOD

Vijay Iyer wrote *Crown Thy Good* in 2021 for pianist Min Kwon's "America/Beautiful" project, in which she commissioned a diverse group of leading American composers to compose variations on *America the Beautiful*. He found the exercise challenging. In his words: "In all honesty, when I was invited to participate in this project, I was quite reluctant. I find nationalistic sentiment dangerous, and will not write or sing praise songs to this or any other nation. I am surely not alone in this, especially now that we've seen some of this nation's most powerful citizens implement terror, cruelty and violence against the most vulnerable, under a false banner of patriotism. In the end, instead

of declining the invitation, I managed to assemble this depleted, ambivalent, mournful echo of the original.”

But when I play this piece, I also find in it an urgency — a vehement reminder that we must reject the artificial construct of borders, pledging our allegiance to the entire extended family of living organisms that inhabit this planet earth and crowning our good with the promise to nurture their well-being and preserve their future.

LD

HEALER

Milad Yousufi was born during the civil war in Afghanistan. At that time the Taliban were ruling Afghanistan, and music was completely banned. At the age of two he started drawing. He drew the piano keys on paper and pretended to play. As a pianist, composer, conductor, poet, singer, painter and calligrapher, Milad’s work is deeply inspired by his country and culture. *Healer* was commissioned in 2020 by the Refugee Orchestra Project, and is informed and

inspired by Milad’s painting of the same title.

LD



MIRROR THE STARS

This piece is from my set *Travels*, inspired by my love of nature and also my mission to foster a love of new music for the next generation. I wrote these pieces for my young students, to carry over into their musical lives their experiences in nature, on summer vacations with their families to our National Parks and back-country sites, so that they could celebrate the beauty of wild places through music. *Mirror the Stars* specifically draws on the magnificent landscape of Big Sur, California, with its coastal cliffs, redwood trees, and the vastness of the ocean and the pristine night sky.

Juhi Bansal

BRIGHT NIGHT

This is a time when, more than ever, the world needs to listen, to be connected, to feel one another, to hear one another. People around the world are fighting for their rights, and they give their lives to achieve those rights. No one is exempted, no one is too far away... *Bright Night* was first written for a woman — a simple musical love letter. A bagatelle, a little declaration. Yet, it became an identity on its own. Now, many years after that personal expression, it is being performed by a woman, an artist, who takes notes to another level, for a greater cause, and in her quest for awareness, for unity, for inclusion... It is performed, at this date, today, at a time that a single woman, Mahsa Amini, becomes the symbol of freedom, of pride, of liberty, of resistance, and of victory of one entire country, and of one vast nation.

Hooshyar Khayam

LULLABY

In March of 2022, in the second month

of Russia’s war against Ukraine, Valentin Silvestrov, like millions of his fellow Ukrainians, became a refugee, traveling by bus with his family westward from their home in Kyiv to Lviv, then across Poland to Berlin. And in his exile, the 84 year old composer saw his music assuming a new meaning for listeners around the world, its mesmerizing, gentle aesthetic offering comfort and hope that peace would return soon to the people of Ukraine. This lullaby, from Silvestrov’s *Four Piano Pieces, Op. 2*, seems especially fitting as a tribute to all the displaced families, parents and children, whose quiet sleep and peaceful dreams have been disrupted by the upheaval and chaos of war.

LD

AMAZING GRACE

I choose to end this album with a song about second chances — a song that has traveled across oceans and continents and generations, speaking in different ways to different people with its message

of redemption and reconciliation. In our fractured and fragile present, we're badly in need of second chances. And as we reckon with the urgency of repairing what is broken and healing what is hurt, this is the hour to awake from our sleep and greet a new dawn, to build a future where we all have the space to stretch our arms and our souls; to nurture this tree of life, to enact a world of change, to believe in spring, to crown our good with brotherhood, to mirror the stars, to love one another, and to let grace lead us home. Go ahead and laugh at all my dreams, but still and always, I believe in us.

LD

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Little Love lyrics by Gabriel Kahane
I'll Be Seeing You lyrics by Irving Kahal
Painting Healer by Milad Yousufi

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