

SONGTREE



MUSIC OF RICARDO ZOHN-MULDOON

TONY ARNOLD, SOPRANO | ZOHN COLLECTIVE | OBERLIN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE

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ZOHN COLLECTIVE + FRIENDS

Molly Barth, flute | Andrew Brown, clarinet/bass clarinet
Noah Getz, saxophone | Paul Vaillancourt, percussion | Stuart Gerber, percussion
Daniel Pesca, piano | Dieter Hennings, guitar | Hanna Hurwitz, violin
Timothy Weiss, conductor

OBERLIN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE

Timothy Weiss, conductor
Silvio Guitian, bass clarinet | Kimberly Bill and John Kirchenbauer, violin I
Seo Yon Park and Jerry Xiong, violin II
Margaret Klucznik and Alexandra Sophocleus, viola
Miriam Liske-Doorandish and Eliot Haas, cello | Michael Martin, bass

DUO DAMIANA

Molly Barth, flute/alto flute | Dieter Hennings, guitar

Songtree was made possible through support from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Howard Hanson Institute for American Music, and Oberlin Conservatory.

1 Candelabra III (2003) 5:35

Daniel Pesca, piano | Stuart Gerber, percussion | Silvio Guitian, bass clarinet
John Kirchenbauer and Kimberly Bill, violin I | Jerry Xiong and Seo Yon Park, violin II
Margaret Klucznik and Alexandra Sophocleus, viola
Miriam Liske-Doorandish and Eliot Haas, cello | Michael Martin, bass

Songtree (2017)

2	Un Ángel	4:09
3	Tropo 1	0:51
4	Day	4:08
5	Lejos	2:18
6	Tarde	0:58
7	Nada	1:46
8	Tropo 2	0:44
9	Night	4:52
10	Puente	1:56
11	Cesa	3:08
12	Tú	2:37
13	Tropo 3	0:43
14	Ineffable	5:04
15	Vacío	5:21

Tony Arnold, soprano | Molly Barth, flute/alto flute | Andrew Brown, clarinet/bass clarinet
Noah Getz, saxophone | Daniel Pesca, piano | Dieter Hennings, guitar
Paul Vaillancourt, percussion (all tracks) | Stuart Gerber, percussion (tracks 2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15)
Hanna Hurwitz, violin | Eliot Haas, cello | Michael Martin, bass

16 Candelabra IV (2015) 6:02

Duo Damiana

TOTAL: 50:15

FROM THE COMPOSER

Candelabra III was written for the Sirius Ensemble with support from the U.S./México Fund for Culture. It is part of a series of works united by the same compositional principle and original material. Each work is an expanded version of the previous one, successively developing in detail and length. Each *Candelabra* is composed for a different instrumental combination.

All the works in the series were conceived as memorials to members of my father's family, Jews who fled Vienna in 1938 to Tlaquepaque, a small village near Guadalajara, Mexico. Despite this radical cultural transplantation, the family flourished. The title derives from the candelabra cactus, which grows and flowers even in inhospitable surroundings and is named for its resemblance to the candelabra.

Candelabra III was written for my father. Like the other works in the series, a minute musical module is expressed in multiple dimensions such as time, pitch, and timbre, creating a structure that emulates the homonymous cactus. For example, at the beginning of the piece, the crotales and piano present a brief melodic figure in unison, but with the peculiarity that the piano adds a second "ornamental" note for each note of the crotales. These piano ornaments are actually quicker renditions of the same melody being presented in the slower unison figure. Finally, harmonics in the strings elongate the resonance of these melodic notes, accumulating as a harmony that sustains underneath. Thus we hear this musical idea in distinct temporal planes and colors, simultaneously as line, ornament, and harmony, just as in the cactus we see small leaves growing on bigger leaves of the same design, which in turn are perched on masses of even larger ones that have coalesced as a "trunk."

The piece continues to unfold in a similar way, with further ramifications of the idea being expressed with increasing complexity contrapuntally, harmonically, and rhythmically. At the climax, all the lines, harmonies, and figures are nested in

a massive chordal texture, and soon after, the rhythm stabilizes in a strong, regular beat. This represents the trunk that sustains the entire structure, the pulsating heart of the piece.

Songtree is an extended song cycle that sets poetry by Raúl Aceves and William Shakespeare. The latter is a fundamental figure in English literature who requires no introduction here. Aceves, on the other hand, is scarcely known to English readers. A contemporary author living in Guadalajara, he is best known for penning whimsical aphorisms that encapsulate profound observations about the human experience. His writing style is crisp, efficient, and direct.

In my mind, what connects two such authors belonging to completely different times and places are shared thematic threads that run through their poems. Of particular note is the link between love, nostalgia, and art. Perhaps I also sought the fractures created by the disparate languages, styles, and sensibilities of these two authors: I believe that these disparities energized my own creativity and enabled me to forge new paths in my music.

As its name suggests, *Songtree* came into being organically, over a long period of time. The initial song was composed in the fall of 2012, while the last one was finished in winter 2017. The gradual growth of this tree meant that some of its branches appeared before others. By branches, I refer to individual songs, or groups of songs, that saw the light of day either independently ("Night"), as a set (*Sones de tierra fría*), or as part of other works before the entire *Songtree* was completed. These branches may still be performed independently of the whole. However, I believe that they find greater expression when performed together.

The songs and interludes that form *Songtree* stem from a primordial set of linear and harmonic archetypes. These archetypes continuously reconfigure, to generate a musical network that is somewhat akin to an unfolding set of variations. At the same time, the form of the work is articulated and bound by a complex symmetric design.

This is particularly apparent in the organization of the overall orchestration, but it is also reflected in the distribution of texts, as well as in structural features of the music. *Songtree* may continue to grow under the drizzle of more poetry. If so, its form will change as new branches grow into place.

Candelabra IV was written for Duo Damiana in 2015. As with *Candelabra III*, it is part of a series of works united by the same compositional principle. Each successive work is a varied transcription of the previous one, as the musical ideas undergo a gradual evolution (slight variations or more detailed development) in response to the new environment of a different instrumental combination.

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After I finished *Candelabra III* in 2003, I considered the cycle closed, as I had composed one work for each of my grandparents and one for my father. There was, for a brief time, however, another member in the family: my father's younger brother Peter, who died while still an infant in Vienna. Until recently, his ephemeral life had been for me just a footnote in my paternal family's history, but I now believe that it was his untimely death that triggered my grandmother's schizophrenia. This tragedy cast a long shadow in the life of my father, who lost not only his brother, but in many ways his mother too. *Candelabra IV* was written as a tribute to little Peter. This piece is scored for alto flute and guitar, two beautiful but fragile instruments that often struggle to be heard.

—Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon



RICARDO ZOHN-MULDOON

Literature inspires many of Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon's compositions, such as the extended song cycle *Songtree*, based on poetry by Raúl Aceves and William Shakespeare; the miniature opera *Niño Polilla*, on a libretto by Juan Trigos Sr.; and the scenic cantata *Comala*, based on the novel *Pedro Páramo*, by the great Mexican author Juan Rulfo. *Comala* was selected as a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 2011.

Zohn-Muldoon's compositional voice is also shaped by a steady collaboration with the particular group of musicians for whom he writes, including soprano Tony Arnold, flutist Molly Barth, percussionists Stuart Gerber and Paul Vaillancourt, guitarist Dieter Hennings, violinist Hanna Hurwitz, pianist and composer Daniel Pesca, and conductor Timothy Weiss, among others. This artistic affinity brought many of these musicians together to co-found the ensemble Zohn Collective in 2017. He has also collaborated across artistic disciplines with cartoonist José Ignacio Solórzano (Jis), songwriter Alfredo Sánchez, PUSH Physical Theater, Garth Fagan Dance, and puppet company La Coperacha.

Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 1962, Zohn-Muldoon studied at the University of California, San Diego and at the University of Pennsylvania, where his principal teacher was George Crumb. He is a professor of composition at the Eastman School of Music and previously taught at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and the Escuela de Música de la Universidad de Guanajuato.

Zohn-Muldoon's works have been performed internationally and supported by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Koussevitsky Music Foundation, Fromm Music Foundation, Barlow Endowment, Guggenheim Foundation, and Mexico's Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte, among other institutions in the U.S. and abroad. Recordings of his music have been released on the Bridge, Verso, CRI, Quindecim, Innova, Ravello, and Tempus labels.



TONY ARNOLD

Celebrated as a “luminary in the world of chamber music and art song” (*Huffington Post*), soprano Tony Arnold is internationally acclaimed as a leading proponent of contemporary music in concert and recording. She has premiered hundreds of works by established and emerging composers. Her unique blend of vocal virtuosity and communicative warmth, combined with wide-ranging skills in education and leadership, were recognized with the Brandeis Creative Arts Award, given in appreciation of “excellence in the arts and the lives and works of distinguished, active American artists.”

A graduate of Oberlin Conservatory and Northwestern University, Arnold is a member of the International Contemporary Ensemble and enjoys regular guest appearances with leading ensembles and presenters worldwide. With more than 30 CDs to her credit, she has recorded a broad segment of the modern vocal repertory with esteemed chamber music colleagues. She earned a Grammy nomination for her recording of George Crumb’s iconic *Ancient Voices of Children* (Bridge). Arnold is a first-prize laureate of the Gaudeamus International and Louise D. McMahon competitions. She teaches at the Peabody Institute and the Tanglewood Music Center.



TIMOTHY WEISS

Conductor Timothy Weiss has earned critical acclaim for his performances and bold programming throughout the United States and abroad. His repertoire in contemporary music is vast and fearless, including master works, very recent compositions, and an impressive number of premieres and commissions. He has been a recipient of the Adventurous Programming Award from the League of American Orchestras.

For more than two decades, Weiss has directed the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble, elevating the group to a level of artistry and virtuosity in performance that rivals the finest new music groups. Recent conducting engagements have included the Arctic Philharmonic in Norway, Orchestra 2001 in Philadelphia, Eastman Broadband Ensemble, BBC Scottish Symphony, Britten Sinfonia in London, International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), and the Melbourne Symphony in Australia.

A committed educator, Weiss is a professor of conducting and chair of the Division of Contemporary Music at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he helped create and mentor the ensembles Eighth Blackbird and ICE. He also serves as a faculty member and conductor of the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble at the Aspen Music Festival and School, and he is music director of the Arctic Philharmonic Sinfonietta in Bodø, Norway.

ZOHN COLLECTIVE

Founded in 2017, the Zohn Collective produces and performs artist-driven projects generated by its member musicians. For this reason, the diversity of backgrounds, interests, and expertise of each member is an essential and vibrant element of the group's model. The ensemble core comprises nine members who include instrumental performers, composers, and a conductor. The flexible group expands or contracts as dictated by the repertory of each project. Together the members engage in performances, workshops, and recording projects, as well as a collaboration with the internationally recognized puppet company La Coperacha at the Festival de Mayo in Guadalajara, Mexico. The collective has been awarded grants from USArtists International and from the Paul R. Judy Center for Innovation and Research. Learn more at zohncollective.com.

DUO DAMIANA

Founded by guitarist Dieter Hennings and flutist Molly Barth, Duo Damiana is focused on broadening the body of cutting-edge repertoire for flute and guitar. Duo Damiana—derived from the Latin term meaning “one who tames or subdues”—has toured throughout the United States and México and presented workshops at institutions including Oberlin Conservatory, Indiana University, and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM). Its members have mentored and performed at the Oregon Bach Festival Composers Symposium and at the National Flute Association convention. Duo Damiana released *Castillos de Viento* on the Innova label. A graduate of Oberlin, CCM, and Northwestern University, Barth is assistant professor of flute at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music and was a founding member of the Grammy Award-winning new music sextet Eighth Blackbird. Hennings is associate professor of guitar at the University of Kentucky. His musical endeavors span from new music on guitar to early music for lute, Baroque guitar, and theorbo.

DANIEL PESCA

Pianist Daniel Pesca is a passionate advocate for new music and a committed performer of chamber music repertoire. He has shared the stage with many leading new music ensembles including Ensemble Signal, Stlee Sinfonietta, Dal Niente, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, and the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble. He has recently performed at the Library of Congress, Kennedy Center, Columbia University's Miller Theatre, Teatro Diana in Guadalajara, on the Dame Myra Hess concerts, at the June in Buffalo festival, and at European contemporary music festivals in Spain, Italy, and Greece. Pesca is featured on recordings from Block M Records and Urtext Classics, including a performance of Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez's piano concerto *Diaries*, which is dedicated to Pesca. His recording of the music of Joseph Schwantner, with flutist Sarah Frisof, was released on Centaur Records in 2016. He holds a doctorate from the Eastman School of Music, where he led a class on contemporary keyboard music and studied piano with Nelita True. He now serves as director of chamber music and artist in residence at the University of Chicago.

STUART GERBER

Lauded for his “consummate virtuosity” by *The New York Times*, percussionist Stuart Gerber has performed extensively on international stages as a soloist and chamber musician. He has worked with such noted composers as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Kaija Saariaho, Tristan Murail, and Steve Reich and has recorded for Innova, Mode, Bridge, Telarc, Code Blue, Centaur, and Albany Records. Recent appearances include the *Tage Aktueller Musik* in Germany, the New Festival in Estonia, and the Cervantino Festival and Chihuahua International Festival in Mexico. A graduate of Oberlin Conservatory and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, Gerber is a professor of percussion at Georgia State University and co-artistic director of the Atlanta contemporary music ensemble Bent Frequency.

OBERLIN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE

The Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble (CME) has served as a fertile training ground for scores of powerhouse new music performers and groundbreaking ensembles, including the multiple Grammy Award-winning sextet Eighth Blackbird and the International Contemporary Ensemble. In performances throughout the academic year, CME performs music of all contemporary styles and genres, from minimalism to serialism, and from electronic to cross genre, mixed media, and beyond.

Under the direction of Timothy Weiss, CME has collaborated with many prominent composers from a variety of backgrounds, including Stephen Hartke, George Crumb, Harrison Birtwistle, Helmut Lachenmann, David Lang, Joan Tower, Frederic Rzewski, Vijay Iyer, and many others. CME premieres works by prominent Oberlin faculty, student, and alumni composers, as well as distinguished guests. In addition to its concerts at Oberlin, CME regularly tours the United States, with performances in recent years taking the ensemble to the Winter Garden, Miller Theatre, Merkin Concert Hall, Harvard University, Benaroya Hall, Palace of Fine Arts, Chicago's Ganz Hall, and Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, as well as in numerous partner concerts with the Cleveland Museum of Art. The ensemble was featured as part of Bang on a Can's 30th anniversary celebration at the Brooklyn Museum.



TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

All translations by Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon

Songtree

Un Ángel

"Para desnudar un Ángel" from

La mirada del camaleón by Raúl Aceves

Un ángel no es un pollo,
es incorrecto meterlo en agua hirviendo
y arrancarle las plumas.

Un ángel no es una mujer,
es incorrecto espiarlo para ver
cuándo se quita el camisón.

Un ángel no tiene nada que ocultar,
por eso vive completamente desnudo
para que siempre se vea la totalidad
a través de su perfecta transparencia.

Si alguna vez descubres un lugar
totalmente vacío,
quiere decir que ahí
sorprendiste al ángel desnudo.

Day

Sonnet XVIII, by William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,

An angel is not a chicken,
it is wrong to put it in boiling water
and tear off its feathers.

An angel is not a woman,
it is wrong to spy on it to see
when its gown comes off.

An angel has nothing to hide,
which is why it lives perpetually nude
so that all there is, may be seen
through its perfect transparency.

If you ever discover a place
that is completely empty,
it means that there
you surprised the naked angel.

By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owst;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growst;
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

Lejos

*"Lejos y hondo" from La mirada del camaleón
by Raúl Aceves*

Antes para verte
simplemente
te dejaba entrar por mis ojos

ahora que ya te fuiste
cierro mis ojos para verte
y los abro para olvidarte

porque te fuiste hacia dentro de mí
lejo y hondo
donde ni siquiera yo
puedo seguirte.

Before, to see you
I would simply let you enter
through my eyes

now, that you have left,
I close my eyes to see you,
and I open them to forget you

because you went inside me,
far and deep,
where not even I
can follow you.

Tarde

*Aphorism from Tandariola
by Raúl Aceves*

El poema llegó tarde a la cita,
el escritor ya se había ido.

The poem was late to the appointment,
the author had already left.

Nada

*"Tan Cisne" from La mirada del camaleón
by Raúl Aceves*

No te deseo nada
ni calor ni frío
ni laguna ni río

I do not wish you anything
neither heat nor cold
neither lake nor river

Tan solo en esta nada
sólo te pido que nades
desnuda en mi nada

All alone in this nothingness
I only ask you to swim
naked in my nothingness

Y que dejes en el agua
la temperatura de tu piel
ni caliente ni fría

And that you leave in the water
the temperature of your skin
neither hot nor cold

Tan sola nada
tan cisne, tan húmeda
en mi deseo de nada.

So lonely swim
so swan, so humid
in my desire for nothing.

Night

Sonnet XXVII, by William Shakespeare

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
But then begins a journey in my head,
To work my mind, when body's work's expired:
For then my thoughts, from far where I abide,
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
Looking on darkness which the blind do see
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.
Lo! Thus, by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee and for myself no quiet find.

Puente

*"El Puente de tus ojos" (fragment) from La
mirada del camaleón by Raúl Aceves*

Entro a la casa de tus ojos negros
cruzando el puente de tu cuerpo,
el puente que cuelga del cuerpo del aire
sostenido por tus cabellos negros.
Y tú sostienes mi cuerpo colgante de tus ojos
con los hilos de tu mirada sólida,
que no me deja caer
al vacío de tus ojos negros.

I enter the house of your dark eyes
crossing the bridge of your body,
the bridge that hangs from the body of the air,
suspended from your black hair.
And you hold my body, which hangs from your eyes
by the threads of your solid gaze,
which does not let me fall into the
vacuum of your dark eyes.

Cesa

*Aphorism from Tandariola
by Raúl Aceves*

Cesa de llover agua,
pero no cesa el canto de los grillos
ni la fragancia de las flores nocturnas.

The rain ceases,
but the song of crickets and the fragrance
of nocturnal flowers remain.

Tú

*"Tú" (fragment) from La mirada
del camaleón by Raúl Aceves*

I
Tú eres todo el sabor
que me dio la vida,
como tomar el té
en una casa de cristal.

I
You are all the flavor
that life gave me,
like drinking tea
in a crystal house.

II
La frontera de tu cuerpo es el mar,
no hay ave que conozca todas tus paredes,
el azul te invadió como llama a lo seco.

II
The frontier of your body is the sea,
there is no bird that can know all your walls,
the blue invaded you as flame to what is dry.

III.
En las piedras donde te sientas
se empollan y saltan a la luz
las canciones.

III
In the stones where you sit
the songs incubate
and hatch into the light.

IV.
Si te cansaras al mediodía
y los ojos se te cerraran,
hasta el día se detendría.

IV
If you became tired at midday
and your eyes were to close,
even the day would stop.

Ineffable

From Sonnet XVII, by William Shakespeare

Who will believe my verse in time to come,
If it were filled with your most high deserts?
Though yet, heaven knows, it is but as a tomb
Which hides your life and shows not half your
parts.

If I could write the beauty of your eyes
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
The age to come would say 'This poet lies:
Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly faces.'

Vacío

Five aphorisms from:

**Aforismos y desaforismos and **Tandariola
by Raúl Aceves*

*El científico explica el misterio,
el poeta lo formula.

The scientist explains the mystery,
the poet formulates it.

**El colibrí, ya no está aquí.

The hummingbird, is no longer here.

**Un gallo descompuesto provocó la salida
anticipada del sol.

A malfunctioning rooster made the sun rise
before dawn.

*Estar aquí es un viaje.

To be here is a trip.

**El vacío recibe diferentes nombres según
sea el sitio donde se localice:
olvido, ausencia, hambre, abismo...

Emptiness receives different names,
depending on its location:
oblivion, absence, hunger, abyss...

OBERLIN MUSIC is the official record label of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. It celebrates the artistic vision and superlative talent of Oberlin's faculty, students, and alumni—on campus and on tour. Essential to this mission is Clonick Hall, a superior recording facility dedicated to capturing studio sessions in the heart of the conservatory. Oberlin Music titles are available on CD and digital channels worldwide. For more information, visit oberlin.edu/oberlinmusic.

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GRAPHIC DESIGN: Ryan Sprowl

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BOOKLET PHOTOGRAPHY: Hanna Hurwitz (Zohn-Muldoon), Larry Kasperek (Arnold), Yevhen Gulenko (Weiss), Fadi Kheir (CME)

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