

The NAXOS logo is located in the top left corner. It consists of the word "NAXOS" in a white, serif font, centered between two horizontal lines. Above the top line are several small, stylized icons of classical architectural columns.

VASCO
MENDONÇA,
**STEP
RIGHT
UP**



ROGER MURARO, PIANO • GULBENKIAN ORCHESTRA • BENJAMIN SHWARTZ

Vasco
MENDONÇA
(b. 1977)

Step Right Up
Group Together, Avoid Speech • Unanswerable Light

	Step Right Up (2018)	23:14
❶	I. Joyful, Celebratory	8:03
❷	II. Nostalgic, Somewhat Desperate	7:43
❸	III. Triumphant	7:24
	Roger Muraro, Piano	
	Group Together, Avoid Speech (2012)	23:00
❹	I. Solemn, Assertive	7:46
❺	II. Nocturnal	6:32
❻	III. Agitated	8:36
	Maaria Leino, Violin I • Jordi Rodriguez, Violin II • Lu Zheng, Viola	
	Marco Pereira, Cello • Pedro Vares, Double Bass	
	Cristina Anchél, Flute • Pedro Ribeiro, Oboe • Esther Georgie, Clarinet	
	Ricardo Ramos, Bassoon	
	Unanswerable Light (2016)	15:07
❼	I. Distant	8:14
❽	II. Grave, Restrained	6:48

Gulbenkian Orchestra
Benjamin Shwartz

Vasco Mendonça (b. 1977)

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Each musical piece is a like an organism, a sort of life form that somehow became the adequate shape to translate an idea of sound through time. Each has its own organs and life cycle; is more or less secretive in its purpose; has a more or less violent birth and death. For this reason, a portrait album is a particular experience: the moment these organisms are put next to each other, a dialogue between them starts to take place.

And you become aware of an environment, an ecosystem created by the singularity and shared traits of each piece. Because all things artistic are much dirtier than they seem. Works and processes are undisciplined, have a will of their own, and tend to cross-contaminate: the DNA of an overarching idea in one piece can be traced back to a microscopic fragment of another; a particularly difficult creation can make you hesitate whether to go again into that painfully unearthed juicy bag of materials – or the exact opposite, for that matter. This forensic exercise underlines the messiness of the mind – and the discreditable secret is that all you can do, as an artist, is to be alert at all times. Ask the questions that will prevent you, as much as possible, from missing the blind spots along the way. It's all coming from one place, really: the same way our body doesn't fall apart while moving, our thoughts are all attached to each other, stemming from the same physical organ, and filtered by the same sensibility.

And this is true for the mind that's obsessively focused on a minute detail of sound, as much as it is for the one chaotically reacting to social and political turmoil. The world is messy - why shouldn't human creation be?

My long-standing obsessions as a composer have been drama, ritual, and mechanism. In my mind, they are all connected – and always present in my work. They're also a symptom of a desire to narrow the gap between music's abstract nature, and my need to respond directly to the world around me.

The oldest piece in the album is *Group Together, Avoid Speech* (commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation for its orchestra's 50th anniversary), premiered at the Gulbenkian Foundation on October 2012, by the Gulbenkian Orchestra conducted by Lawrence Foster. Asked to highlight some of its wonderful musicians, I created a nine-piece ensemble with the string and woodwind principals. Throughout the piece, these nine actors take turns in the spotlight, sometimes on their own, sometimes in groups. The work's title is a play on words of a passage from T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*. It has three movements: the first, *Solemn, Assertive*, starts and stops, shifting gears quickly, in a sort of film-like editing process; the second, *Nocturnal*, is slow, archaic, and mostly whispered; the final movement, *Agitated (not too expressive)*, is a sort of fast machine with a ghost inside – a ghost that

eventually undermines the initial objectivity with expression and pathos.

Unanswerable Light (co-commissioned by Casa da Musica and Câmara Municipal de Matosinhos) was premiered at Casa da Música in January 2015, by the Orquestra Sinfónica Casa da Música, conducted by Pablo Rus Broseta. Originally titled *Still Point* after Eliot's *Four Quartets*, it eventually took its definitive name from Philip Larkin's poem *Deceptions*. It's a memorial to a deceased friend, with both movements, *Distant (quiet, effervescent)* and *Grave, Restrained* alternating moments of contemplation and absence with passages of riotous fury – a kaleidoscope of loss.

The piano concerto *Step Right Up* (co-commissioned by the Fundação Gulbenkian and the Orquestra Sinfónica de São Paulo) was premiered at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in June 2018, by the Gulbenkian Orchestra conducted by Benjamin Shwartz and Roger Muraro, piano. It started out from an image I've always found peculiar, that of a pianist sitting in front of the orchestra. They all share the same space, but are visually separated by this inanimate black stain – the piano. To me, this always seemed like an appropriate visual metaphor for what happens in sound: a polite (but not particularly intimate) relationship between the most splendid social organism, and the most astounding sound machine. The word 'machine' is crucial: the precision and clarity of a machine make it a suitable metaphor for 'my' piano, a hosting

mechanism of worlds as diverse as Baroque ornamentation and African bell rituals. Perhaps the best way to describe its three movements (*Joyful, celebratory; Nostalgic, Somewhat Desperate; Triumphant*) is that of a line that ascends quickly (in the first solo intervention of the piano), stabilises and descends in the first; starts high, slowly dives down in the second; and goes frantically up and down in the last.

'Step Right Up' is an expression used to summon people at countryside gatherings, urging them to come closer and witness a show – something special and different. In a simple fashion, it stands for what is possibly the noblest purpose of art – the deepening of human interaction; the act of leaving a 'stain upon the silence' we all came from and will ultimately return to. It felt right to extend this invitation to the album title.

Vasco Mendonça

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Vasco Mendonça

Vasco Mendonça's music has been widely performed internationally by groups such as the AskolSchönberg Ensemble, Nieuw Ensemble, Axiom Ensemble, Remix Ensemble and the International Contemporary Ensemble among others. He has been commissioned by and featured in major music festivals such as the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, the Verbier Festival, Musica Nova Helsinki and the Music International Festival of Morelia, and venues such as the Philharmonie de Paris, Lincoln Center, the Concertgebouw, La Monnaie, Kaaitheater, Sala São Paulo and Casa da Música. His interest in composing for the stage has led him to collaborate with some of the most cutting-edge music-theatre companies in Europe, such as Music Theatre Wales, Muziektheater Transparant and LOD muziektheater, and with directors such as Katie Mitchell, Michael McCarthy and Luís Miguel Cintra. His music has been released on Classic Concert Records. Mendonça studied in London and Amsterdam with George Benjamin and Klaas de Vries, and his distinctions include the Lopes Graça Composition prize, Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative, Composer-in-Residence at the Casa da Música, several artistic grants from the Ministry of Culture and representing Portugal at UNESCO's International Rostrum of Composers.

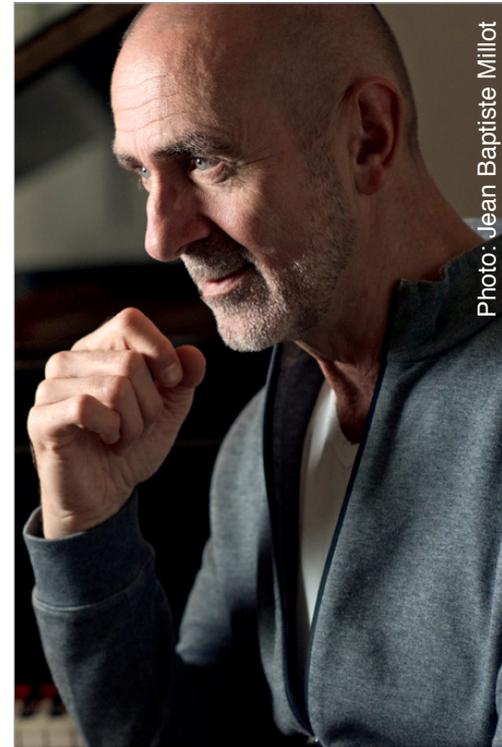
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Photo: Hugo Glendinning

Roger Muraro

Born to Venetian parents in Lyon in 1959, Roger Muraro began studying the saxophone in his native city before teaching himself to play the piano. At the age of 19 he entered Yvonne Loriod's class at the Conservatoire de Paris where he met Olivier Messiaen, and quickly became established as one of the leading interpreters of the French composer. Muraro studied with Éliane Richepin for several years, winning prizes at the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow and the International 'Franz Liszt' Piano Competition in Parma. Muraro has performed in the world's leading concert halls, worked with prestigious conductors and ensembles, and has recorded the majority of his discography for Universal. In June 2017 he performed Messiaen's *Fauvettes de l'Hérault – concert des garrigues* in Tokyo, a work created from sketches Muraro found in the archives of the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. In 2018 the piece was premiered in Paris at the Festival Présences, and the world premiere recording released on harmonia mundi. Muraro teaches at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris.



Benjamin Shwartz

Benjamin Shwartz served as music director of the Orkiestra Symfoniczna NFM Wrocław from 2013 to 2016. His tenure coincided with a move to a new state-of-the-art concert hall inaugurated in September 2015 and during 2016, Wrocław's year as European Capital of Culture. As a guest conductor he has been invited to work with orchestras such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Gulbenkian Orchestras, the BBC Scottish, Tokyo, Iceland and Aarhus Symphony Orchestras, as well as the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Orchestre National de Lille. In the field of opera, Shwartz made his Oper Köln debut in 2016 with Bernstein's *Candide*. Earlier productions include *Die Fledermaus* and *La Bohème* at the Royal Swedish Opera, Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédict* at the Deutsches Nationaltheater und Staatskapelle Weimar, Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims*, Bellini's *La sonnambula* and Gounod's *Faust* at the Curtis Institute. In 2017–18 he was invited to conduct the Orchestre de l'Opéra national de Paris in a choreographed production of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Violin Concerto*.



Gulbenkian Orchestra



In 1962 the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation established the Gulbenkian Chamber Orchestra, which subsequently expanded to become the Orquestra Gulbenkian in 1971 and now comprises a core body of 66 instrumentalists. The ensemble's wide repertoire spans the Classical period, a significant part of 19th-century orchestral literature and much of the music of the 20th century. Works belonging to the current repertoire of the grand traditional symphonic orchestras are delivered by the orchestra in versions that are close to the orchestrations they originally were conceived for. In each season the orchestra performs a regular series of concerts at the Gulbenkian Grande Auditório in Lisbon, where it has worked with prestigious conductors and soloists. It has also performed widely throughout Portugal and has been gradually expanding its activities on an international level, performing in Europe, Asia Africa and the Americas. Its discography includes releases on Philips Records, Deutsche Grammophon, Hyperion, Teldec, Erato, Adès, Nimbus, Lyrinx, Naïve and Pentatone, among others, and this activity has been recognised with several prestigious international prizes.

Portuguese composer Vasco Mendonça regards this portrait album as a letter to himself – written over time and with different chapters that throw light on his long-standing obsessions with drama, ritual and precision mechanism. *Group Together*, *Avoid Speech* highlights the string and woodwind principals of the wonderful Gulbenkian Orchestra to create ‘a Baroque concerto grosso on steroids’, while *Unanswerable Light* is a memorial to a friend and a meditation on fury and loss. The piano concerto *Step Right Up* is ‘a ritual celebration between the most incredible music box – the orchestra – and the most beautiful sound machine – the piano.’



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WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Roger Muraro, Piano 1–3
Gulbenkian Orchestra • Benjamin Shwartz

Recorded: 17–22 June 2018 at the Grande Auditório, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal

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