

William Howard plays

# SIXTEEN CONTEMPORARY LOVE SONGS

for piano



ORCHID CLASSICS

## Sixteen Contemporary Love Songs

1	<b>Howard Skempton</b> (b.1947) <i>Solitary Highland Song</i>	3.20
2	<b>Elena Kats-Chernin</b> (b.1957) <i>Roses in a Box</i>	3.41
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5	<b>Nico Muhly</b> (b.1981) <i>Falling Pairs</i>	3.49
6	<b>Joby Talbot</b> (b.1971) <i>Camille</i>	4.06
7	<b>David Knotts</b> (b.1972) <i>Album Leaf</i>	3.48
8	<b>Frederick Viner</b> (b.1994) <i>Herz an Herz</i>	4.44
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12	<b>Bernard Hughes</b> (b.1974) <i>O du Liebe meiner Liebe</i>	5.44
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William Howard, *piano*

## **Sixteen Contemporary Love Songs**

### **About this recording**

In 2016 a long-standing ambition of mine was fulfilled when my album *Sixteen Love Songs* was released on Orchid Classics. For years I had been planning to put together a collection of piano pieces, mainly from the 19th and early 20th centuries, that all had a timeless appeal and reflected different aspects of love. As well as being hauntingly beautiful, many of them have had interesting afterlives as TV or film music, or even as popular songs.

Having commissioned and performed music by living composers throughout my professional life, I was not far into this project before I started wondering what the contemporary equivalents to these romantic works would sound like. Love songs can be found in music across the world and across the centuries, and today's composers do, of course, write about love. But I was not sure how composers would react to the invitation to write, specifically, a love song for solo piano, given the strong association of 'songs without words' with piano music of the romantic era. As it happened, all those that I approached were very enthusiastic about the idea; so much so, in fact, that I also decided, with Judith Weir's encouragement, to launch an international competition for writing piano love songs. Running from June to October 2016, it had an astonishing response, attracting 526 entrants aged 13 to 90 from 61 different countries.

This album features the two winners of that competition, Chia-Ying Lin (over-25 category) and Frederick Viner (under-25) alongside 14 pieces that I have commissioned. For the commissions, I deliberately approached composers who represent a broad range of different musical styles. The pieces are varied not just in the way they are written, but also in the aspects of love that the composers have chosen, which range from dedications to spouses and an eight-month old child, to a quotation from St. Paul, a Wagnerian love-duet and tributes to Gabriel Fauré and Dusty Springfield. What they have in common is that they are

all quite short and all expressions of something very personal, which I feel offers the listener a very special way into the musical world of each individual composer.

I would be delighted if anyone likes all 16 pieces equally. It is more likely that different people will like different pieces. Some of these love songs may require repeated listening in order to yield all their secrets, others are more immediately seductive. Whatever your response, I hope this brief journey through different contemporary approaches to writing music appeals to your curiosity and gives some idea of the wealth of individual talent among today's composers. My professional life has been enriched by the imagination, diversity and creativity of the composers with whom I have worked over the years; I hope this recording contributes to seeing their skill and commitment more widely recognised.

*William Howard*

### **Notes on the pieces and composers**

All the pieces on this album were commissioned by William Howard for his Love Songs Project and premiered by him in various venues in the UK between May 2016 and July 2017.

### **HOWARD SKEMPTON**

#### ***Solitary Highland Song (2017)***

*Commission supported by Tessa and Peter Watkins*

Composer's note: As a young pianist, I was allowed to go my own way, and I remember being drawn to Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*. Many of my little piano pieces are really songs without words, and I suspect that a fair number of these are love songs. My *Solitary Highland Song* takes its title from Wordsworth's *The Solitary Reaper*:

"Behold her, single in a field,  
Yon solitary Highland Lass!"

Wordsworth was haunted by “the melancholy strain ... the maiden sang”, but we are left to muse on his feelings for the singer. What is palpable is the poem. What is palpable in the case of my *Solitary Highland Song* is the sound of the piano.

**Howard Skempton** (British, b.1947) has worked as a composer, accordionist, and music publisher. He studied in London with Cornelius Cardew from 1967, which helped Skempton to discover a musical language of great simplicity. Since then he has continued to write undeflected by compositional trends, producing a corpus of more than 300 works – many pieces being miniatures for solo piano or accordion. Skempton calls these pieces “the central nervous system” of his work. His works have twice won prizes at the British Composer Awards. *Tendrils* for string quartet was awarded the prize for ‘best chamber-scale composition’ by the Royal Philharmonic Society in 2005.

### **ELENA KATS-CHERNIN**

#### ***Roses in a Box* (2017)**

*Commission supported by Henry and Gia Shaw*

Composer’s note: The notes have space around them in this piece, a little bit like dust over the keys. The title refers to roses delivered to a loved one, they are packed in a box and have a beautiful glow, very tender and elegant. And yet, they could be a farewell gift...

**Elena Kats-Chernin** (Australian, b.1957), born in Tashkent, studied with Richard Toop and Helmut Lachenmann. An early success was *Clocks* (1993) for Ensemble Modern, since followed by six operas and instrumental commissions from the major Australian performing groups. *Eliza Aria* from her ballet *Wild Swans* has been heard across the world through its commercial use by Lloyds Bank, and her music has been recorded by both Australian and European record labels. In 2017 ABC Classics released a 10 CD box set of her music to celebrate her 60th birthday.

## **RICHARD REED PARRY**

### ***Fast Cloud: A Love Song (2017)***

*Commission supported by Alex and Diana Good, for each other*

Composer's note: When William invited me to contribute to his Love Songs project, I envisioned writing something which encapsulated some of the more blurry, chaotic and slightly overwhelming aspects of 'love' - a word with uncountable meanings and equally uncountable ways in which to be experienced and felt. I bookended and interspersed a very fast and fairly relentless barrage of notes and tempo changes with a short thematic fragment (that sounds almost as if it's directly quoted from a 19th century love song and could have been written by a number of different composers of that era), as a sort of frame within which to explore an entirely different type of 'love song'.

**Richard Reed Parry** (Canadian, b.1977) is a multi-instrumentalist, composer and producer, best known as a core member of the art-rock band Arcade Fire. His solo work represents his own search for an aesthetic and experiential balance, a way to follow his own path while being part of one of this generation's most acclaimed bands. His debut album of solo composition *Music for Heart and Breath* (2014) was produced with his great friend and collaborator Bryce Dessner of The National. The album features performances by Dessner, Kronos Quartet, Nico Muhly and YMusic Ensemble.

## **JUDITH WEIR**

### ***fragile (2017)***

*Commission supported by Nicholas and Jane Ferguson, for their 40th wedding anniversary*

Composer's note: William Howard's Love Song Project, launched in 2016, involved over 500 composers from 61 countries, including myself. We had been invited to re-imagine in our own contemporary spirit the genre of Love Songs for solo piano, so popular in the classical repertory of the past. *fragile* is my own contribution.

**Judith Weir** (Scottish, b.1954) studied composition with John Tavener, Robin Holloway and Gunther Schuller. In 2014 she was appointed Master of the Queen's Music and in 2015 she became Associate Composer to the BBC Singers. She is the composer of several operas (written for Kent Opera, Scottish Opera, ENO and Bregenz) which have been widely performed. She has written orchestral music for the BBC Symphony, Boston Symphony and Minnesota Orchestras. Much of her music has been recorded, and is available on the NMC, Delphian and Signum labels.

### **NICO MUHLY**

#### ***Falling Pairs* (2017)**

*Commission supported by Edward and Rosie Harford*

Composer's note: Anything can be a love song, when sung with intent. *Falling Pairs* obsesses over the small energy of two neighbouring notes spreading out – from close to far and back again.

**Nico Muhly** (American, b.1981) is a composer and sought-after collaborator whose influences range from American minimalism to the Anglican choral tradition. The recipient of commissions from The Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall, St. Paul's Cathedral, and others, he has written more than 80 works for the concert stage. Muhly studied composition at the Juilliard School before working as an editor and conductor for Philip Glass. He is part of the artist-run record label Bedroom Community, which released his first two albums, *Speaks Volumes* (2006) and *Mothertongue* (2008). He lives in New York City.

### **JOBY TALBOT**

#### ***Camille* (2017)**

*Commission supported by Sergio Biseo 'per Rosemary, con amore'*

Composer's note: The dedicatee of this short piano love song is our baby daughter, Camille, who was eight months old at the time of writing and a complete joy.

**Joby Talbot** (British, b.1971) has composed prolifically in a variety of genres including instrumental and vocal concert music, film and television scores, pop arrangements, opera and works for dance. Notable works include the 60-minute choral piece *Path of Miracles* (2005); *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2011) and *The Winter's Tale* (2014) for The Royal Ballet; *Worlds, Stars, Systems, Infinity* (2012) for the Philharmonia Orchestra; and the score for the animated feature *Sing* (2016). His first opera, *Everest*, was premiered in 2015 by The Dallas Opera, for whom he is shortly to begin a second opera while completing work on a concerto for guitarist Miloš Karadaglić (2018).

## **DAVID KNOTTS**

### ***Album Leaf* (2017)**

*Commission supported by Primrose Metcalf, in memory of her late husband Simon*  
Composer's note: I take a great deal of inspiration from a peculiarly melancholy sensibility which is discernible in the work of many British composers, writers and artists. Our grey skies, long winters and national propensity for pessimism all find their way into our artistic identity and this is reflected in many of my pieces. As a love song, *Album Leaf* is polarised towards love's sorrow rather than its happiness. The image of autumn's first leaves as they fall from the trees inspired the piece's opening figuration and the piece's subtitle – *September Sadness*.

**David Knotts** (British, b.1972) first came to public attention as a finalist in the 1994 Young Musician of the Year Competition when the London Sinfonietta premiered his first large scale work, *Songs of Parting*. The exceptional warmth and lyricism of these Whitman settings brought interest from many quarters and a string of commissions from some of the country's finest soloists, orchestras and chamber-music ensembles followed. These have included the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Endymion Ensemble, English National Opera, the Composers Ensemble, the Britten Estate (to celebrate the re-opening of Aldeburgh's Jubilee Hall) and a series of pieces for the Schubert Ensemble.

## **FREDERICK VINER**

### ***Herz an Herz* (2016)**

Composer's note: *Herz an Herz*, as the title implies (*heart to heart*), is a love duet. Two distinct voices, characterised through their respective male and female vocal registers, negotiate a warm, heartfelt melody through a loosely strophic form. Initially the voices sing in turn, each section – or verse – led predominantly by one. Each time their lines entwine, virtuosic flourishes ascend the keyboard, interrupting to render them silent again. It is only after one particularly tumultuous episode that the true duet appears: out of the murky resonances of the lowest 'A' emerge the throbbing chords and impassioned vocal lines from Wagner's famous duet, *O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe* from the second act of *Tristan und Isolde*. The 'singers', now reconciled, come together for one final verse before a fleeting memory of the beginning gently ushers in the end of the piece.

*Herz an Herz* was the winning piece in the Under-25 category of William Howard's Love Song Composing Competition.

**Frederick Viner** (British, b.1994) studied at York and Oxford Universities. His music has received many accolades, winning the *Ebor Organ Prize* in 2015, the Royal Northern Sinfonia's *Mozarts of Tomorrow* Competition in 2016 for *Sleeping Gomat*, and in 2017, The Henfrey Composition Prize for *Bells Wrung*, and the prestigious NCEM Young Composers Award for *Prayer from Afar*, which was broadcast on BBC Radio 3. He was Artist-in-Residence with Sage Gateshead's Young Sinfonia and has been commissioned by *Choir & Organ* magazine. In 2017 he signed as a UYMP House Composer and was also appointed Composer-in-Residence at Eton College.

## **ROBERT SAXTON**

### ***For Teresa (2016)***

*Commission supported by Tim Suter, for his wife Helen's 60th birthday*

*For Teresa* is based on the musical letters of my wife's name, tErESA CAHill and, at the close, quotes the opening of Beethoven's *Für Elise*, another 'love song' which, it is generally accepted, was written for Theresa Malfatti and titled *Für Therese*.

**Robert Saxton** (British, b.1953), following early advice from Benjamin Britten and lessons with Elisabeth Lutyens, studied at Cambridge and Oxford Universities. He won the Gaudeamus International Composers Prize at the age of twenty-one and is currently Professor of Composition and Tutorial Fellow in Music at Worcester College, Oxford. He was elected an Honorary Fellow of St Catharine's College, Cambridge and is Composer-in-Association at the Purcell School. Recent commissions include a song cycle for baritone Roderick Williams, *Hortus Musicae* for pianist Clare Hammond, and *The Resurrection of the Soldiers*, commissioned by the Presteigne Festival where he was Composer-in-Residence in 2016.

## **MICHAEL ZEV GORDON**

### ***For Fiammetta (2017)***

*Commission supported by Geoffrey Barnett*

Composer's note: A four-verse song without words for my wife, more than 25 years since I met her. At the start, a simple two-part texture; then the lines intertwine and the harmonies become richer and more complex. The third verse pulls back only to push on again; in the fourth, the music gradually settles: a low bass grounds the rocking accompaniment, the melody rises up and up.

**Michael Zev Gordon** (British, b.1963) is a composer of highly crafted, powerfully expressive works, in which the tonal and atonal happily rub shoulders; memory is a recurring subject. He has written for a wide range of genres, and his music has been performed by many leading performers, including the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, London Sinfonietta, King's College Cambridge Choir, Carolin Widmann, Huw Watkins, Nicholas Daniel, Toby Spence and Alina Ibragimova. Gordon's piano music disc *On Memory* was listed in The Times top 10 contemporary CDs in its year of issue.

### **PAVEL ZEMEK NOVÁK**

#### **Sonata No.7 (*Little Song of Love and Mercy*) (2016)**

*Commission supported by Susan Vicary*

Composer's note: This piece is based on the following text from the New Testament 1 Corinthians 13-14: "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

**Pavel Zemek Novák** (Czech, b.1957), one of the most individual and distinctive Czech composers of his generation, has written a large body of symphonic, choral, chamber and instrumental works that reflect both his devout religious faith and his interest in Moravian folk traditions. Among his most significant works are his Symphony No.2 *St. John Passion*, which won a Janáček Foundation prize in 1998, his Symphony No.5, which received first prize in a competition to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Brno State Philharmonic Orchestra in 2004 and a remarkable 75-minute cycle of 24 Preludes and Fugues for solo piano (1989-2006), written for William Howard.

## **BERNARD HUGHES**

### ***O du Liebe meiner Liebe (2017)***

*Commission supported by Ted and Jenny Salmon*

Composer's note: *O du Liebe meiner Liebe* has two musical sources: Gabriel Fauré's Prelude in E-flat minor, Op.103 No.6 and J. S. Bach's chorale arrangement *O du Liebe meiner Liebe* BWV491. I have long been fascinated by the Fauré Prelude, brilliantly constructed as a strict canon, a baroque idea presented in a late Romantic sound-world. My piece is an *homage*, borrowing Fauré's texture and creating a (freer) canon of my own, using Fauré's first nine notes in rotation. The inner part is the same notes in a slower rhythm, and is the song at the centre of the music. When the opening canon returns later in the piece the earlier *cantus firmus* is replaced by the Bach chorale setting from which my piece takes its name.

**Bernard Hughes** (British, b.1974) has had his music performed by ensembles including the BBC Singers, Trinity Boys' Choir and Juice Vocal Ensemble at major venues including Symphony Hall, Birmingham and St Paul's Cathedral. His music has won awards both in Britain and internationally and is regularly broadcast on BBC Radio 3. A CD of Bernard Hughes's choral music, *I am the Song*, performed by the BBC Singers, was released in 2016. Bernard Hughes is Composer-in-Residence at St Paul's Girls' School in London.

## **PIERS HELLAWELL**

### ***Love on the Escalator (2016)***

*Commission supported by Andrew and Caroline Joy*

Composer's note: The piece takes on a technical challenge, namely to encompass the musical path from detachment through engrossing passion to serenity, an expressive counterpart to the human experience of love – without recourse to the elaborate pianistic resources that characterize much Romantic repertoire. I tried to avoid reliance on traditional pianistic devices – save for tremolo, whose surging effect characterises the piece's most animated passages.

The 'escalator' of the title is a recurrent chord sequence that I use in many works as a harmonic structure; it is stated in detached fashion at the outset, and then underpins a set of increasingly passionate variants. Following the plan above, the course of *Love on the Escalator* runs, therefore, from a rather non-committal opening mood, through increasing involvement to a serene close.

**Piers Hellawell** (British, b.1956) has had work performed by numerous leading artists such as the LSO, Håkan Hardenberger, Evelyn Glennie, Philharmonia Orchestra and Hilliard Ensemble. His fourth CD, *Airs, Waters*, brought together *Agrícolas*, for Robert Plane (clarinet) and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, with recent chamber works; *Syzygy* was premiered in 2013 by the Swedish Chamber Orchestra, followed by works for British and American musicians. 2016 saw *Wild Flow* at the BBC Proms, *Up By The Roots* – a collaboration with poet Sinéad Morrissey – and a feature at Detroit's Great Lakes Festival. Hellawell won the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's 2017 Major Individual Award.

## **CHIA-YING LIN**

### ***Chanson Perpétuelle* (2016)**

*Chia-Ying Lin's competition prize supported by David Howard*

Composer's note: This piece seeks to describe the kind of love which is everlasting and constantly renewed over time. Structurally speaking, the rhythmic motif of this piece was set to expand from a small scale to its augmented form, which is harmoniously elaborated through the course of music, and to a certain point the seemingly perpetual rhythm becomes undetectable – as if it were freed. The piece ultimately evaporates into a space of openness, leaving the air full of sweetness, freedom and love.

*Chanson Perpétuelle* was the winning piece in the Over-25 category of William Howard's Love Song Composing Competition

**Chia-Ying Lin** (Taiwanese, b.1990) studied composition in Taipei, Manchester,

Rome and Budapest. She has earned international recognition since 2015 with third prize at the First International Jean Sibelius Composition Competition (Finland), first prize at the International Composition Competition Piero Farulli (Italy) and second prize at the International Composition Competition Michele Novaro (Italy). She also received a commission prize from the Goethe-Institut, Korea, for its Asian Composers Showcase 2017. Chia-Ying's works have been performed and broadcast in many countries including Taiwan, the UK, Finland, Italy, Hungary and South Korea.

### **DAVID MATTHEWS**

#### ***A Love Song (2016)***

*Commission supported by Neil King, for Matilda*

Composer's note: The Romantic musical language of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was ideally suited to the love song, far more than the various languages of our own day, where the concept seems to be disappearing even from popular music. My own musical language continues in many ways to be Romantic, and I am also very concerned with the renewal of melody, so possibly my task was easier than for some others taking part in this commission project; nevertheless it took me months to get the notes right in a piece lasting under four minutes. It is dedicated to my wife, Jenifer.

**David Matthews** (British, b.1943) worked for Benjamin Britten in the late 1960s and learned much about the craft of composition from him, also from Nicholas Maw and Peter Sculthorpe. His many works include nine symphonies, six symphonic poems, nine concertos and 14 string quartets. He has also written books on Britten and Tippett, and many articles and reviews. His music is frequently broadcast, and a wide range of works is available on CD. 2018 sees the premieres of his Ninth Symphony and a song cycle on poems by Muriel Spark for Sarah Connolly and the Nash Ensemble.

## **CHERYL FRANCES-HOAD**

### ***Love Song for Dusty (2016)***

*Commission supported by Joanna Lumley*

Composer's note: When William asked me to write a Love Song for his wonderful project, the first thing that occurred to me was that it would be a fabulous opportunity to completely let my compositional hair down! I wanted to pen something utterly heart-on-sleeve, with big melodies and grand pianistic gestures, something unashamedly over the top but also totally sincere, perhaps occasionally even a little romantically unhinged...

The inspiration came from various sources – primarily William's new album of Romantic Love Songs, but I also imagined my piece to be the result of what Chopin or Liszt would have written if they had lived in the 1960s and been heavily into Dusty Springfield (a temporary obsession of mine when I discovered that other types of music existed other than 'Classical'). As a composer I am usually scared of repetition, but in this work I wanted to keep as much as I could to a typical love song structure, with verses, choruses and bridges. This commission also fulfilled a long-standing ambition to write a piece with an 'up a tone' key change at the end.

**Cheryl Frances-Hoad** (British, b.1980) has been composing to commission since she was fifteen. She trained as a cellist and pianist at the Menuhin School before going on to Cambridge and King's College, London. Influenced by both classical tradition and contemporary inspirations, including literature, painting and dance, her music has been widely performed, broadcast and commercially recorded. Her works have won numerous awards and have included all genres from opera, ballet and concerto to song, chamber and solo music.



**William Howard would like to thank the following who helped to support his commissioning project, the love song competition and this recording:** Carolyn Anstice, Geoffrey Barnett, Elizabeth Bates, Sergio and Rosemary Biseo, Richard and Vicki Botwood, The John S Cohen Foundation, Nicholas and Jane Ferguson, Richard and Celia Foulkes, David Fraser Jenkins, Alex and Diana Good, Paul Greatbatch, Edward and Rosie Harford, Susan Horsewood-Lee, David Howard, Edmund and Miranda Howard, Philip and Sarah Howard, Peter Jackson, Andrew and Caroline Joy, Crispin Kelly and Ffiona Lewis, Kilfinan Trust, Joanna Lumley, Neil King, Primrose Metcalf, Marie-Pierre Moine, Matilda Oppenheimer, Jane Pepper, Peter Phillips, Ted and Jenny Salmon, Bernard Samuels, Henry and Gia Shaw, Frances Stevens, Tim Suter, Susan Vicary, Peter and Tessa Watkins, Julian and Clare Whately, Louise Woods and the Chamber Music 2000 Trust.

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**WILLIAM HOWARD** is established as one of Britain's leading pianists, enjoying a career that has taken him to over 40 different countries. His performing life consists of solo recitals, concerto performances, guest appearances with chamber ensembles and instrumentalists. In 1983 he founded the Schubert Ensemble, with which he performed for 35 years until its retirement in 2018. Winner of the 1998 Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Best Chamber Ensemble, the Schubert Ensemble earned a worldwide reputation as one of the finest piano and string ensembles, as well as setting up several ground-breaking educational projects and commissioning 50 concert works.

William Howard's solo career has taken him to many of Britain's most important festivals, including Bath, Brighton and Cheltenham, and he has been artist in residence at several others. He has performed many times at Wigmore Hall, the South Bank and at Kings Place in London and has broadcast regularly for BBC Radio 3. For many years he has been invited to perform and teach at the Dartington International Summer School.

As soloist and chamber musician he can be heard on over 40 CDs, released by Chandos, Hyperion, ASV, NMC, Collins Classics, Black Box, Champs Hill, Nimbus and Orchid Classics. His recording of Dvořák Piano Works was selected in the Gramophone Critics' Choice, and his recording of Fibich's *Moods, Impressions and Souvenirs* won a Diapason D'Or award in France. His 2011 recording of Pavel Zemek Novák's extraordinary 75-minute cycle of 24 Preludes and Fugues, described by David Matthews as "one of the finest piano works of our time" received a double five-star review in the BBC Music Magazine.

He is passionate about 19th century piano repertoire, especially Schubert, Chopin, Schumann and Fauré. He also has a strong interest in Czech piano music, and has been particularly acclaimed for his performance of Janáček, for which he received a medal from the Czech Minister of Culture in 1986. He has commissioned new works throughout his professional career and has

been involved in the premieres of over 100 new works. Many leading composers have written multiple works for him over decades, including Piers Hellawell, David Matthews, Pavel Zemek Novák, Anthony Powers, Howard Skempton and Judith Weir.



William Howard  
plays Sixteen Love  
Songs for Piano

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Engineer: Ben Connellan

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