



JUSTIN MERRITT

**BLENDER**

MATTHEW MCCRIGHT  
*PIANO*

**1. Blender (3:19)****Album Leaves**

2. Meltwater (2:51)
3. Mosquito (1:40)
4. Quiet Land (3:02)
5. Sprinkles (1:43)
6. Album Leaves (2:46)
7. Old Eagle Lake Cemetery (1:48)
8. Ancient Stars (1:29)
9. Flurries (0:40)
10. Solstice (3:23)
11. The Long Drive Home (1:36)
12. Epilogue (1:27)

**13. False Memories (6:40)****14. Fires of 1918 (2:54)****Five Preludes for piano (10:40)**

15. Prelude No. 1 (1:52)
16. Prelude No. 2 (3:20)
17. Prelude No. 3 (1:46)
18. Prelude No. 4 (2:27)
19. Prelude No. 5 (1:14)

**20. The Last Blackbird (4:50)****21. Sans Serif (3:40)****22. Cube Dance (12:34)****23. Glyph (3:43)****24. Unnamed Orchestra (4:24)**

--75:15--



The **Blender Project** arose from a simple question: what kind of music would sound good in a bar attached to a bowling alley? A couple of years ago I went to a concert at the famous Bryant Lake Bowl, a venue that is a bar, bowling alley, and live performance space rolled into one. One cannot indulge in pianissimo sonic explorations while crowds of toasted hipsters celebrate picking up a 7-10 split just a few feet away.

A couple of weeks later I had a dream. I was playing my heart out at the piano, and it was working. Usually, when I dream of making music I wake up to find that the dream music wasn't real music; I was just dreaming about the way music might make me feel. But this time I woke up at 4:00AM knowing exactly what I needed to do. I knew I could either go back to sleep and forget it forever, or wake up and write it all down. I sacrificed for my art and sat with my dog, composing while it snowed outside and the rest of the world slept.

All of the **Blender Project** pieces are for amplified piano with live electronic manipulation. The manipulation is such a deep part of these pieces that they are all really duos between the musician at the piano and the musician at the laptop. Each piece includes a tremendous level of improvisation for both musicians and will be dramatically different at each performance.

All of the pieces of the **Blender Project** were composed in 2013 in Northfield, Minnesota.  
– Justin Merritt

Composer **Justin Merritt** was the youngest-ever winner of the ASCAP Foundation/Rudolph Nissim Award. He is also the winner of a host of other awards including the American Composers Forum McKnight Fellowship, the Copland Award, the Minnesota Orchestra Composers Institute Prize, and the Polyphonos Prize.

He received his Bachelors from Trinity University and his Masters and Doctorate from Indiana University. He studied composition with Samuel Adler, Sven-David Sandstrom, Claude Baker, Timothy Kramer, Don Freund, and electronic and computer music with Jeffrey Hass. He is currently Associate Professor of Composition at St. Olaf College. He resides in Northfield, Minnesota with his wife Faye and their children Cullen Fang Ouxiang and Molly Fang Qinghe.

Hear more of his music at [mooneast.com](http://mooneast.com)



American pianist **Matthew McCright** has performed extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Asia and the South Pacific as piano soloist and chamber musician. He has thrilled audiences and critics alike with imaginative programming that places the greatest piano repertoire alongside the music of today's most innovative risk-takers. McCright currently resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is a member of the piano faculty of Carleton College, and teaches privately in the Twin Cities. He maintains an active performing schedule as one of the most sought after pianists of his generation in contemporary music. He has premiered numerous new pieces, many written for him, and has collaborated with such composers as Pauline Oliveros, Terry Riley, Augusta Read Thomas, Paul Dresher, Michael Gordon, Mary Ellen Childs, Julia Wolfe, Mark Anthony Turnage, Alvin Lucier, and Judith Lang Zaimont among many others.

An accomplished recording artist, McCright has released four solo recordings: three albums on innova Recordings (*Second Childhood*, *A Waltz through the Vapor*, and *Blender*) and a 2011 release of the piano works of Gene Gutchë on Centaur Records. An upcoming release on Albany Records of the piano music of Olivier Messiaen is planned for 2015.



For more information, please visit [matthewmccright.org](http://matthewmccright.org)

## **Blender**

*Blender* is the first piece composed for the *Blender Project*. It is an over the top electro-acoustic cadenza that, if played properly, should literally shake both the piano and audience. This recording was done in a single take, an incredible testament to Matt's musicianship and creativity.

## **Album Leaves**

*Album Leaves* is a sweetly nostalgic piece that roughly charts the course of a year. *Meltwater* is spring, the beginning of the year. As little rivulets of water rush by, flashes of light play along the surface. *Mosquito* is without a doubt the most virtuosic piece on this album. The difficulty doesn't come from complex counterpoint but rather the opposite. The speed and precision required to play this piece leave absolutely no room for the slightest misstep. *Quiet Land* (dedicated to my wife Faye Yuedong Merritt) is a sweetly melodic piece influenced by the sound of Yuyao opera. In particular, the central section features the Guzheng (actually the eraser end of a pencil on piano strings). This piece also asks the pianist (or, in this case, the composer) to whistle.

*Sprinkles* is the sound of dripping water after a rainstorm. *Album Leaves* (dedicated to my Granna) is my version of a new jazz standard. Although *Old Eagle Lake Cemetery* (dedicated to my son Cullen) sounds electronic, like music from the *Blender Project* pieces, it is entirely acoustic. It includes plucked strings, paper and metal twisted into the upper strings, and Mardi Gras beads laid across the middle strings. *Ancient Stars* also uses extended piano techniques but here the effect is less spooky and more mysterious.

*Flurries* (dedicated to my daughter Molly) is a virtuosic flourish of a piece, as fiendishly difficult as it is simple and clean to listen to. *Solstice* (dedicated to my mother) is the musical companion to *Album Leaves*. It is lyrical and lovely. *The Long Drive Home* is dedicated to my father, who went with me on so many long car rides back from school. *Epilogue* completes the cycle by returning to the music of *Meltwater*, now with a sense of nostalgia.

*Album Leaves* was begun while in residence at Copland House, Cortland Manor, New York as a recipient of the Aaron Copland Award and completed as a part of the McKnight Composers Fellowship through the American Composers Forum. Composed 2010-12 Cortland Manor, New York, and Northfield, Minnesota. Commissioned and premiered by Kathryn Ananda-Owens

### **False Memories**

Throughout *False Memories* are Drone Strikes, a single low piano note that is looped and heard each time with different manipulation, usually deeply distorted. Layered over the Drone Strikes is a quiet, sad reverie.

### **Fires of 1918**

*Fires of 1918* consists almost entirely of an obsessive eighth-note rhythm pounded out on a single string.

### **5 Preludes**

*5 Preludes* for piano is by far the oldest collection on the album—it dates from my school days at Indiana. *Prelude No. 1* is a virtuosic chromatic fantasy inspired by the Scriabin preludes. *Prelude No. 2* evokes 3 distant

carillons, each playing its own tune at its own speed. *Prelude No. 3* is a high-speed, rip-roaring toccata.

The penultimate prelude begins with a series of bright sparkling gestures, which gives way to two floating lines that move at different speeds. The pianist gradually speeds up and slows down each hand independently so that they “pass” each other on the way to a short reprise. The final prelude is a rhythmic, rock-inspired allegro inspired by piano-roll pieces played at high speed.

*Composed 1999, Bloomington, Indiana. Premiered by Winston Choi.*

### **The Last Blackbird**

One day in late November, my son looked out the window and saw a blackbird pecking in the snow. He said, “Hm, the last blackbird.” I didn’t know what the piece would be, but I knew someday that would be the title. The Last Blackbird builds a very slow loop from the first few opening gestures. Each of the loops is of different lengths, so the overall ostinato is constantly changing. The piano then comments and adds filigree over this loop.

### **Sans Serif**

This entire piece uses only the woody percussive aspect of the piano. The pianist never touches either the strings or keys. A sort of percussion ensemble is created using delay chains.

### **Cube Dance**

A Cube Dance is a theoretical construct that connects every possible chord to every other possible chord. For this piece I decided to take it literally, so I danced around the cube with super fast “strange arpeggios” that are heard



at the beginning of the piece. Each time you hear the strange arpeggios you know you are dancing the Cube Dance. The second section is a different kind of dance in which two measures are repeated over and over, going through a kaleidoscopic transformation each time they are heard. A slower “cascading scales” section allows the pianist to catch his breath before a final breakneck coda.

*Composed 2013, Northfield, Minnesota. Commissioned and premiered by Matthew McCright.*

### **Glyph**

*Glyph* is unabashed (well, slightly abashed) dance music. A simple chordal ostinato in the piano is rhythmicized with the laptop.

### **Unnamed Orchestra**

The image in my mind is of a guitar player on a beach, gently strumming chords while the last of the beach party stare into the dying fire. *Unnamed Orchestra* is the sound of strummed piano strings over silently fingered chords.

### **Credits**

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