



INFRASTRUCTURE

THE SONGS OF DAVID SISCO



DAVID FUNG, PIANO

MICHAEL KELLY, BARITONE

ELIZABETH MONDRAGON, MEZZO-SOPRANO

LAURA STRICKING, SOPRANO

DAVID SISCO, BARITONE

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Italianate

Michael Kelly, baritone; David Fung, piano

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|------|
| 1. | Florentine Ladies | 1:26 |
| 2. | The Po | 1:22 |
| 3. | Cistio | 2:24 |
| 4. | Old Men | 1:16 |
| 5. | In Scarperia | 3:28 |
| 6. | Moon Over the Magnolia Tree | 2:13 |
| 7. | Abbodanza | 3:10 |

Missed Connections

Elizabeth Mondragon, mezzo-soprano; David Fung, piano

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|-----|---------------------------------------|------|
| 8. | Flowers on the A Train to 14th Street | 1:47 |
| 9. | John Lohse | 1:08 |
| 10. | Breaking Night | 0:53 |
| 11. | Oh Starbucks!!! | 1:08 |
| 12. | RE: Goodbye J | 0:46 |
| 13. | Sad Panda | 0:29 |
| 14. | Typewriters & Things | 2:17 |
| 15. | Red Velvet Chair | 1:12 |
| 16. | Endless-summer-taco-man | 2:52 |
| 17. | Amor | 1:04 |
| 18. | I Can't Wait | 2:10 |

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| 19. | Infrastructure | 2:23 |
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David Sisco, baritone; David Fung, piano

The Wrong Kind of Fountain Enthusiast

Laura Strickling, soprano; David Fung, piano

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| 20. | Freshy & Tasty, But... | 0:20 |
| 21. | Buckingham Fountain (5 Stars) | 1:47 |

22.	Buckingham Fountain (2 Stars)	1:16
23.	Prada on Rodeo Drive	0:39
24.	Pawn Shop Snooty	1:04
25.	A Very Large Hole	2:40
26.	This is the Hotel for You	1:23
27.	Smell the Nastiness	2:54
28.	Hooka was Great	0:29
29.	My Best Beloved	4:10
	<i>Michael Kelly, baritone; David Fung, piano</i>	
30.	Patterns	13:32
	<i>Elizabeth Mondragon, mezzo-soprano; David Fung, piano</i>	
31.	Where Memories Go to Die	4:03
	<i>David Sisco, baritone; David Fung, piano</i>	
	Dear God	
	<i>Laura Strickling, soprano; David Fung, piano</i>	
32.	Joyce	0:50
33.	Charles	1:06
34.	Peter	0:29
35.	Allison	0:26
36.	Barbara	0:36
37.	Dennis	0:26
38.	Carrie	0:35
39.	Frank	0:18
40.	Charlene	0:37
41.	Norma	0:28
42.	Jeff	1:29
43.	Thomas	1:18

Total Playing Time 76:25

INTRODUCTION

DAVID SISCO

Several years ago, my mom said to me, “David, you have a beautiful voice—I love to hear you sing. And you play the piano very well. But you will be remembered as a composer.” While very sweet, it was not exactly what I wanted to hear after completing a graduate degree in vocal performance! And yet, I have come around to my mom’s point of view. I believe that writing for the voice is central to my life’s calling.

I began composing art song during my undergraduate degree at Syracuse University. I continued to hone my craft in the following years by collaborating with poets, singers, and pianists, each of whom illuminated the delicate alchemy of the art form. This recording represents over 25 years of my output as an art song composer. It is a joy to share these songs with you through the immeasurable talents of the recording artists on this album, each of whom is very dear to me.

As I write this, I am painfully aware of the turmoil in our world. Somehow, our studio sessions felt like an artistic oasis from the outside noise. I hope this album might offer you the same respite and inspiration it afforded me in its making. Thank you for listening!

PROGRAM NOTES

Italianate

This cycle of seven songs features the poetry of Linda Dini Jenkins, whom I met in Boston at Old South Church in 1997. I had the pleasure of getting to know Linda's poetry over the course of our early friendship, and even created a cycle entitled *Nature's Song* (2003) based on her work. After reading some of Linda's poetry about her travels in Italy, I once again asked if I might set her beautiful words to music. Her wry wit and tenderness—along with her gift of making the ordinary extraordinary—is on full display here. Michael Kelly premiered the cycle in 2014 at Carnegie Hall, and I am thrilled to have him breathe life into it again.

Missed Connections

Missed Connections was written for my longtime muse, Elizabeth Mondragon, and was chosen as the winning entry for the 2010 NATS Composition Award. One of the ways I believe art song will continue to thrive is through the setting of contemporary texts—you'll find many of them throughout this album. Here, I highlight vibrant, pensive, and delightfully odd anonymous posts from the "Missed Connections" section of craigslist.com. This set reflects the human desire to find (or avoid) one another. These musical vignettes—which were set verbatim, including spelling errors—will take you to Starbucks, a food truck, a middle school in Connecticut, and other disparate destinations.

Infrastructure

Barbara Worton is a prolific writer whose books include *Chatterbox: Stories from a Noisy Life*, and *Too Tall Alice*, among others. I met her through her lifelong friend, Linda Dini Jenkins. I set this poem as a gift for a birthday celebration produced by Barbara and Linda, and dedicated it to Paul Sperry, to whom this entire album is dedicated. For me, it perfectly encapsulates a New Yorkers' skepticism—nay, neuroticism (of course, I include myself in that characterization).

The Wrong Kind of Fountain Enthusiast

I initially pitched to Laura Strickling the idea of composing for her a song cycle based on texts from *The Lexicon of Musical Invective* (a favorite read when I'm in the mood for a little *schadenfreude*). After mentioning concerns about copyright, Laura suggested we look to online reviews instead, which we soon discovered were just as savage and funny! This cycle features colorful reviews from across the United States. Similar to the *Missed Connections* set, I delighted in exploring a variety of musical idioms to dramatize these wonderfully ridiculous reviews.

My Best Beloved

I first became familiar with Francis Quarles' poem when singing a beautiful choral setting by Chris DeBlasio. I was eager to try my hand at the poem and was surprised to learn there were several more verses, which are well worth reading. Like DeBlasio, however, I opted to highlight only three, originally composing this setting for tenor David Root.

Patterns

I first became familiar with Amy Lowell's epic poem "Patterns" when reading a collection of women's poetry. Lowell is best known for bringing the imagist movement of Ezra Pound to America and expanding upon it in her own work. The inherent drama of the story in "Patterns" initially drew me in, but as I began composing, it was the challenge of creating a clear and compelling musical world on a larger canvas that ultimately fueled me.

Where Memories Go to Die

Several years ago, I was perusing the poetry section of an independent book store in Provincetown. I picked up a book of poetry by Dennis Rhodes, and the cashier asked me if I knew him. When I replied that I didn't, he explained that Dennis lived in town, gave me his phone number, and suggested I reach out. We met for coffee, and Dennis was as delightful, vulnerable, and joy-filled as his poetry. "Where Memories Go to Die" is the final piece of my song cycle *Six Dennis Rhodes Poems*. I remain touched by how easy it is to visualize the story featured in this poem—and by the narrator's clinging to hope. Or perhaps I am projecting...

Dear God

This cycle of children's prayers to God was written for soprano Tami Petty, mezzo-soprano Sarah Lambert Connelly, and pianist Howard Watkins, who premiered at a recital given at Marble Collegiate Church in 2004. Tami had forwarded to me an email chain featuring the children's prayers, and their preciousness and wonder tickled me. I attempted to capture the delicious mix of simplicity and complexity in these miniature compositions.



Italianate (2011)

Florentine Ladies

The Florentine Ladies, with their tasteful silk
dresses and fine leather shoes,
Scurry past us in the morning.
Regal and determined, with bare legs and
strong, excellent calves,
Developed over centuries of climbing the steep
hills,
Of traversing the wild stone streets,
Armed with umbrellas, purses and purpose.

The silver-haired Florentine Ladies move
through history into history
Hardly noticing us at all.

The Po

The Po is dangerous here, but we go down
anyway;
It is good to cool our feet on such a sticky day.
The locals stay close to shore, and so do we,
while
Tiny fish swim around our toes, receiving us and
Sending us off in safety.

Cistio

Common sense tells me there is at least
one scorpion in the wood pile next to the table
Where I am sitting. But after ten days here I am
no longer worried about it.
Foolish to worry—or not to

The scorpion will do what it does and I will do
what I do, whatever that is now:

Sitting, longing, imagining a future here,

perhaps,
but more realistically, a past, in another time,
another tongue.

Here, I have been bitten by history from behind,
like the sting of the scorpion's tale,
hidden, but ever present.

Old Men

Old men sit at the bar on Sunday mornings
Together, outside, in jackets and hats, whiskey
In their cups smoothing out the strong black
coffee,
Their wives in church across the square
Keeping it all together.

In Scarperia

The very word is sharp, like a scalpel
Like sword and saber and pierce

Old city of steel craftsmen
Ancient purveyor of crusaders' arms
Today your weapons are used against rich
cheeses
On the serving tables of the wealthy

Your town square, once filled with
The din of trade and travel
Is still home to the stony towered sanctuary
Whose campanile regularly mark the hours
Counting off the generations of our days
But now, instead of soldiers, there is art

Costumed children making art in the piazza—
With painted faces, they giggle, turning
Scraps of colored cloth and paper
Into holy joyful noise

They delight in delivering a different kind of
praise

To you, Creator God
Who makes all things new

Moon Over the Magnolia Tree

There is a bright moon over the magnolia tree
And I cannot sleep. From the window I see
Lightning bugs party in the garden, hear
An owl provide the music of their dance.
The tree snails sway.

Abbondanza

We sit at the kitchen table in the morning
Drinking the juice of mangoes and blood
oranges
Eating creamy yogurt out of chipped white
porcelain cups
Planning our day, as if we needed anything more
than this

The early sun and strong black coffee are
enough

The easy laughter and deep breathing are
enough

Flowering magnolias and the scent of wild
jasmine are enough

Anticipation and memory are enough

Today, we agree, we will go nowhere
Because for now, everything we need is right
here
In the warm June breezes of plenty
Laundry dancing in the yard

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Missed Connections (2010)

Flowers on the A Train to 14th Street (Posting ID: 421053777)

You boarded with flowers. An exquisite odor
filled the musty car. I commented, then sniffed.
You asked if I was happy, with a charming smile.
I said, yes. No. Yes. And you made me smile.
Maybe you'd like to find out how happy I can be.

John Lohse (Posting ID: 264434977)

Location: East Ridge Middle School,
Connecticut. When I was in the sixth grade
there was this boy named John Lohse. He was
the reason I knew that I was strait (sic). He had
these really big ears that I always wanted to
touch. Anyway! This is sort of creepy, but I really
want to find him and talk to him. If you know
him than (sic) please help me.

Breaking Night (Posting ID: 267905152)

I know I shouldn't still be thinking about you.
But I am. It's not completely forgotten.

Oh Starbucks!! (Posting ID: 267260390)

Starbucks is the devil. I saw you today and
wanted to talk. You looked too. How do you
start a random conversation over high-priced
coffee?

RE: Goodbye J (Posting ID: Unknown)

Assuming this is who I think it is... YOU never
tried to understand. I tried like hell. I'VE been
trying to say goodbye for a long time. YOU
never had anything for me in the first place, and
said so yourself. THIS is proof. Post it in some
obscure area of the internet instead of talking

to me about it. Typical. I wish you a fun time up there on your cross!

Sad Panda (Posting ID: 269004501)

I'm a sad panda.

Typewriters & Things (Posting ID: 473836399)

I understand this is a bit sheepish, and that I should have left the store earlier. But I didn't. I met you this afternoon in a shop on 8th Avenue as I was picking up my newly fixed typewriter. No, not met, talked with. I was speechless. Usually I have more to say, but you left me that way. I can't thank you enough. When I walked out of the store, you were already crossing 8th. My options were then to leave it alone, feel good about the brief interaction, or attempt to live in a John Cusack movie. Voila! I hope to hear from you. I'll have more to say next time.

Red Velvet Chair (Posting ID: 2642655965)

Do you still have my red velvet chair? I don't know why we stopped talking. I enjoyed being friends. I still have your couch and the blanket; we can trade back. Hope you are well and successful. Posting this feels ridiculous and it was so long ago but I don't know how to get in touch with you and... I loved that chair

Endless-summer-taco-man (Posting ID: 778651185)

Dear endless-summer-taco-man, I write this to you in great hopes that you will find it one day and that you will forgive me for causing any form of distress upon my request for two pork tacos and two chicken tacos WITHOUT cheese.

What I really meant to say in my inebriated state of mind, was "please no dairy products on my taco, please." Thus explaining my sad, devastated face as I peered into the crevice of my seemingly delicious taco only to find sour cream!!! Why, me? Why? But you noticed the sadness of my lactose intolerant soul, and gave me two free tacos. No cheese, and no sour cream. Thank you for your kindness, endless-summer-taco-man.

Amor (Posting ID: 264396987)

I miss you amor so much.

I Can't Wait (Posting ID: 1456623155)

Somebody wants you. Somebody needs you. Somebody dreams about you every single night. Somebody can't breathe, without you it's lonely. Somebody hopes that someday you will see that somebody is me. I haven't seen you in seven years and in one month I will finally see you. Hopefully safe in your arms. Love, me.

Infrastructure (2004)

I'm not sure about the Lincoln Tunnel, a tile here, tile there picked clean off the wall.

I'm not sure about the first glass of water you get in that too busy coffee shop on the corner of

Fifth and Second.
It's from that cloudy
glass and lunch
tray tower
that's been standing
behind the counter
all day.

I'm not sure
about wearing
shorts on
the subway and
taking a seat.

I'm not sure
about taking
the Times
off the top
of the stack
outside the newsstand.

I'm not sure
just how clean
the toilet is in a
house where every
one is so organic
they don't use
Lestoil to wash the floor.

But I'm really not sure
when I step down
the sidewalk
will meet my feet.
I'm not sure.
I've got a history
in this city.

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The Wrong Kind of Fountain Enthusiast

Fresh & Tasty, But... (Anonymous)

I was stabbed here. The food was fresh and drinks were tasty, but I was stabbed here. Would consider going back.

Buckingham Fountain, Part I (5 Stars) (Post by: Malia R., 8.1.13)

I heart you Buckingham Fountain! Seriously beautiful. One of my favorite spots in the city. I literally felt like I could sit there for hours watching the fountain. The backdrop of Chicago behind the fountain is so gorgeous. If you are visiting Chicago, please do not forget to stop here or you'll regret it every second of every minute of your life.

Buckingham Fountain, Part II (2 Stars) (Post by: Kelly M., 9.27.14)

Yup, it's a fountain. Not much more to say about it. Historic? Iconic? Chicago landmark? Okay, sure. But at the end of the day there are so many more exciting things to do, see, or take in on your visit to Chicago. This one is just a fountain. Maybe I'm not the right kind of fountain enthusiast to appreciate this spot.

Prada on Rodeo Drive (Post by: Caleb B., 2.10.09)

Prada on Rodeo Drive... because sometimes you want a shopping experience that resembles a coke-fueled intergalactic disco.

Pawn Shop Snooty (Post by: Tanya K., 6.8.13)

Has tons of guitars. All seem rather overpriced. Service is what you expect from a Russian mob backed store front. I never understood Pawn

Shops that deal in used Fossils, Timex, and Invictas. I like my Pawn Shops to carry Rolex and Omegas. I'm Pawn Shop snooty.

A Very Large Hole (Post by: Ken B., 8.27.18)

Once you have been to Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon is a joke. There are no animals, no greenery, no clear blue streams... just a muddy river, rock, and sheer cliffs. You'll go "ooh" and "ah" for thirty seconds and then feel guilty that you're ready to leave after that. I have been to Yellowstone twice, with the buffalo herds walking near my car, an entire elk herd passing me when I went hiking, bald eagles so big I thought it was Jurassic Park, bears twice and even a passing wolf trying to steal a baby buffalo and the standoff among the herd. And at the Grand Canyon? A hole. A very, very large hole.

This is the Hotel for You (Post by: Laura M., 3.12.18)

If you enjoy feeling like your life is in immediate peril, than this is the hotel for you. If you like blood stains in your sheets and slashes on your comforter... then don't look any further. How about some roaches and bed bugs to keep you company for the night. If you like getting robbed, being watched, hearing domestic disputes, children screaming and police sirens... I would highly recommend this hotel.

Smell the Nastiness (Post by: Mark, 12.22.17)

I live at [undisclosed location] and really wanted to like this place. But, frankly, it smells. Maybe if you sit outside you can't smell the nastiness, but inside is gross. It smells like it has been

there for fifty years and never been clean but it is a newer place. Some of the staff look cracked out. Looks like something you'd find in a seedy part of town. I will avoid this place in the future. There are plenty of other places in the area to have a better experience.

[Response from owner] Hi Mark. Thank you so much for your valuable feedback. Quick question for you! Which part made the smell worse? The part where we didn't serve you any alcohol or the part where you harassed the female wait staff by exposing your chest hair in lieu of showing your I.D. Next time you want a Miller Lite, please bring the appropriate I.D. that is required when you go to a bar and we'll gladly serve you.

Hooka was Great (Post by: Unknown, 12.14.14)

Hooka was great, but someone got shot while we were there. So I'm taking a star away for that. 4 out of 5.

My Best Beloved (2003)

E'en like two little bank-dividing brooks,
That wash the pebbles with their wanton
streams,
And having rang'd and search'd a thousand
nooks,
Meet both at length in silver-breasted Thames,
Where in a greater current they conjoyn:
So I my best beloved's am; so he is mine.

E'en so we met; and after long pursuit,
E'en so we joy'n'd; we both became entire;

No need for either to renew a suit,
For I was flax and he was flames of fire:
Our firm-united souls did more than twine;
So I my best beloved's am; so he is mine.

Nor Time, nor Place, nor Chance, nor Death can
bow

My least desires unto the least remove;
He's firmly mine by oath; I his by vow;
He's mine by faith; and I am his by love;
He's mine by water; I am his by wine;
Thus I my best beloved's am; thus he is mine.

*Francis Quarles (1592-1694) This poem has been
abridged from its original version.*

Patterns (2000)

I walk down the garden paths,
And all the daffodils
Are blowing, and the bright blue squills.
I walk down the patterned garden paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
With my powdered hair and jewelled fan,
I too am a rare
Pattern. As I wander down
The garden paths.

My dress is richly figured,
And the train
Makes a pink and silver stain
On the gravel, and the thrift
Of the borders.
Just a plate of current fashion,
Tripping by in high-heeled, ribboned shoes.
Not a softness anywhere about me,
Only whale-bone and brocade.

And I sink on a seat in the shade
Of a lime tree. For my passion
Wars against the stiff brocade.
The daffodils and squills
Flutter in the breeze
As they please.
And I weep;
For the lime tree is in blossom
And one small flower has dropped upon my
bosom.

And the plashing of waterdrops
In the marble fountain
Comes down the garden paths.
The dripping never stops.
Underneath my stiffened gown
Is the softness of a woman bathing in a marble
basin,
A basin in the midst of hedges grown
So thick, she cannot see her lover hiding,
But she guesses he is near,
And the sliding of the water
Seems the stroking of a dear
Hand upon her.

What is Summer in a fine brocaded gown!
I should like to see it lying in a heap upon the
ground.
All the pink and silver crumpled up on the
ground.
I would be the pink and silver as I ran along the
paths,
And he would stumble after,
Bewildered by my laughter.
I should see the sun flashing from his sword-hilt
and the buckles on his shoes.

I would choose
To lead him in a maze along the patterned paths,
A bright and laughing maze for my heavy-
booted lover,
Till he caught me in the shade,
And the buttons of his waistcoat bruised my
body as he clasped me,
Aching, melting, unafraid.

Underneath the fallen blossom
In my bosom,
Is a letter I have hid.
It was brought to me this morning by a rider
from the Duke.
“Madam, we regret to inform you that Lord
Hartwell
Died in action Thursday sen’night.”
As I read it in the morning sunlight,
The letters squirmed like snakes.
“Any answer, Madam,” said my footman.
“No,” I told him.
“See that the messenger takes some
refreshment.
No, no answer.”

In a month he would have been my husband.
In a month, here, beneath this lime,
We would have broke the pattern;
He for me, and I for him,
He as Colonel, I as Lady,
On this shady seat.
He had a whim
That sunlight carried blessing.
And I answered, “It shall be as you have said.”
Now he is dead.

In Summer and in Winter I shall walk
Up and down
The patterned garden paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
Gorgeously arrayed,
Boned and stayed.
And the softness of my body will be guarded
from embrace
By each button, hook, and lace.
For the man who should loose me is dead,
Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,
In a pattern called a war.
Christ! What are patterns for?
*Amy Lowell (1874 - 1925) This poem has been
abridged from its original version.*

Where Memories Go to Die (2009)

An old man on the beach
asked me if I knew
where memories go to die.

I was uncertain
if it was a riddle
or a sincere question.

Your memories of mine,
was all I could think of to say.
I was embarrassed.

Why theirs of course, he said,
pointing to the children
at play on the beach

Three girls and a boy
and one little dog—
building a sandcastle.

I heard in the music
of their innocent laughter
a plausible answer.

Beneath my feet, I said.
Each grain of sand on this beach
is a lost memory.

I wiggled my toes
and a sudden, damp sorrow
crept into my heart.

The old man sneered,
unconvinced, and walked away
making sad footprints.

I watched him grow small.
I felt the beach grow sadder
as the joyous castle grew—

the work of tiny hands
and grains of happiness.
Infinitesimal.

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Dear God (2004)

Joyce

Dear God, thank you for my baby brother, but
what I asked for is a puppy. I've never asked for
anything before. You can look it up.

Charles

Dear God, I don't think anybody could be a
better God than you. Well, I just want you to
know that. And I'm not just saying that because
you're already God. Amen.

Peter

Dear God, please send Dennis Clark to a
different summer camp this year.

Allison

God, I read the Bible. What does beget mean?
Nobody will tell me. Love, Allison.

Barbara

Dear God, if you watch in church on Sunday, I'll
show you my new shoes. Barbara.

Dennis

Dear God, my grandpa says you were around
when he was a little boy. How far back do you
go?

Carrie

Dear God, maybe Cain and Abel would not kill
each other so much if they each had their own
rooms. It works out OK for me and my sister.

Frank

Dear God, I'm doing the best I can. Really.

Charlene

Dear God, how did you know you were God?
Who told you?

Norma

Dear God, did you mean for giraffes to look like
that, or was it an accident? Love, Norma.

Jeff

Dear God, it is great the way you always get the
stars in the right place. Why can't you do that
with the moon?

Thomas

Dear God, I didn't think orange went with purple
until I saw the sunset Tuesday night. That was
really cool.

DAVID SISCO

David Sisco (he/him) is an award-winning composer whose works have been performed at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. A recipient of the 2010 NATS Composition Award, his songs have been featured in concerts presented by Friends & Enemies of New Music, Joy in Singing, Lyric Fest, and SongFest. He has received commissions from the Cayuga Vocal Ensemble, Florida International University Concert Choir, Manhattan Girls Chorus, Minnesota State University Moorhead Concert Choir, and TRANScend Vocal Ensemble. An alumnus of the esteemed BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop and the New Dramatists Composer-Librettist Studio, David's theatrical works include *BAIT n' SWISH*, *Falling to Earth*, *Variations on a Theme of You*, and the forthcoming musical *Great Company*, with librettist Lynn Rosen. He currently serves on the adjunct voice faculty at NYU Steinhardt and maintains an international presence as a voice teacher and pedagogue.

davidsisco.com | IG: @siscosongs



David Sisco © Josh Levinson

DAVID FUNG

Praised by *The Washington Post* for his “poetic and exquisitely sculpted interpretations,” pianist **David Fung** is internationally recognized for performances of elegance, depth, and clarity across a wide-ranging repertoire. With a repertoire of over sixty concertos, he has appeared as a soloist with leading orchestras including the Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Detroit Symphony, and Israel Philharmonic, as well as Australia’s Sydney, Melbourne, and Queensland Symphony Orchestras, collaborating with such artists as Gustavo Dudamel, Marin Alsop, and Yuja Wang. An incisive interpreter of Mozart and Bach, he has collaborated with Orpheus, the Orchestra of St. Luke’s, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the chamber orchestras of Israel, Los Angeles, and Melbourne. Fung has performed at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, the Louvre, the Gewandhaus, and major halls throughout Europe and Asia. He first gained international attention as a laureate of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels and the Arthur Rubinstein International Master Piano Competition in Tel Aviv, earning both the Mozart and Chamber Music Prizes at the latter.



MICHAEL KELLY

Praised as “vocally splendid,” American baritone, librettist and poet, **Michael Kelly**, is celebrated for riveting interpretations of works performed at internationally acclaimed venues, including Carnegie Hall, Santa Fe Opera, 54 Below and Theatre du Châtelet. He is an avid interpreter of new music, collaborating to create, perform and record world premieres of works. As writer and performer, much of his focus is on the queer experience and LGBTQ+ advocacy. Michael is also the curator for the baritone volume of NewMusicShelf’s Anthology of New Music. He is an alumnus of Eastman and Juilliard schools.

michael-kelly.com.



ELIZABETH MONDRAGON

Washington, DC-based mezzo-soprano **Elizabeth Mondragon**'s performance experience ranges from opera and art song to musical theater and oratorio. Principal roles include Carmen, Rosina, Penelope and Dido, and she has been a featured soloist in the Verdi *Messa di Requiem*, Bach Christmas Oratorio, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solenne*, and Mozart's *Mass in C Minor*. She has performed medieval music of Spain and Mexico with the *Ars Musicae Hispaniae* Harp Ensemble, and American Songbook reviews with DC's *Songs for Seniors*. She is an avid recitalist, featured in concerts at the *Wiscasset Salon Series*, *New York Arts Society*, and *Weill Recital Hall*, and is co-director of the DC Metro chapter of *Opera on Tap*. Her enthusiasm for new music has led to her regularly performing and premiering new works, including those of her dearest friend *David Sisco*, with whom she has collaborated musically for the entirety of the almost three decades they have known each other. His songs are her favorites!



Elizabeth Mondragon @ GarryMorgenstein

LAURA STRICKLING

Two-time GRAMMY® award nominee for Best Classical Vocal Solo Album for *40@40* (2024) and *Confessions* (2022), soprano **Laura Strickling** is celebrated for her work performing and promoting contemporary music, with an emphasis on new additions to the modern song canon. Host of SongCycle – a podcast covering all things song – she curated The NewMusicShelf *Anthology for Soprano*, and has commissioned songs from 55 composers (and counting) through her ambitious 40@40 Project. Her “flexible voice, crystalline diction, and warm presence,” (New York Times) have made her a welcome guest soloist for a range of opera, oratorio, concert, and chamber works – from Bach to Britten and beyond.

laurastrickling.com



Production

Recorded on October 25, 26, and November 8, 2025 at Oktaven Audio, Mount Vernon, New York

Produced by David Sisco

Engineered by Ryan Streber

Artwork & Design by James Cardell-Oliver

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Acknowledgements

This album is dedicated to the memory of Paul Sperry, who was an ardent supporter of my work as an art song composer. Endless gratitude to my husband, Elbert Ma, who makes each day better, and to David, Laura, Elizabeth, and Michael for bringing my music to life in such vivid technicolor. Many thanks to Ryan Streber, Deanna Fielding, Jessica Slaven and everyone at Oktaven Audio. I am grateful to David Weuste, James Cardell-Oliver, and everyone at First Inversion for their guidance and support.

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