

SINNER DON'T LET THIS HARVEST PASS

CASSANDRA MILLER

MICHAEL FINNISSY

ROBERT SCHUMANN



JOSEPH HAVLAT, piano



SINNER: DON'T LET THIS HARVEST PASS

CASSANDRA MILLER • MICHAEL FINNISSY • ROBERT SCHUMANN

JOSEPH HAVLAT, PIANO

Cassandra Miller (b. 1976) & Michael Finnissy (b. 1946)

Sinner, Don't Let This Harvest Pass*

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 1. | I. Either strident or striding or somewhere in between* | 2:59 |
| 2. | II. Sostenuto. Legato** | 6:29 |
| 3. | III. Andante mosso** | 1:51 |
| 4. | IV. Sweetly, with forgiveness and patience* | 5:11 |

* Cassandra Miller

** Michael Finnissy

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Geistervariationen

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|------|
| 5. | Thema. Leise: innig | 1:50 |
| 6. | Variation I. | 1:25 |
| 7. | Variation II. Canonisch | 2:05 |
| 8. | Variation III. Etwas belebter | 1:40 |
| 9. | Variation IV. | 2:04 |
| 10. | Variation V. | 2:46 |



Michael Finnissy

RS Geistervariationen*

11.	Thema. Leise: innig	2:23
12.	Trope (a)	2:34
13.	Variation I. Andante molto sostenuto	1:30
14.	Variation II. Canonisch	1:15
15.	Trope (b)	4:11
16.	Variation III. Con tenerezza	2:34
17.	Trope (c)	1:15
18.	Variation IV.	2:10
19.	Variation V.	1:20
20.	Chor der Geisterstimmen aus der Ferne	6:16

Cassandra Miller

Philip the Wanderer

21.	I. Gently rumbling without direction	8:17
22.	II. Broadly (surveilling the great expanse)	4:07
23.	III. Joyfully, jauntily, as if running away from regret itself	3:05

Total playing time 69:19

****Premiere recording***

Schumann, Finnissey and Miller: Variations Re-imagined

My first foray into performing the works of Cassandra Miller and Michael Finnissey date back to 2018, in which I had the opportunity to play Philip the Wanderer and Finnissey's 2nd Piano Concerto in a London concert. I was immediately taken with the richness of sonic texture that pervaded both works. The immense tapestries contained within had a fractal-like quality: while the essential language in the two differed, I could see an architectural similarity in that the smallest musical shapes and details were replicated simultaneously on a larger scale. One could focus on both the micro-music and the macro with its broad swathes of sound. It was an exciting revelation into the very fabric of sound-as-music, and piqued my curiosity in both these composer's works. That they are a natural fit on a programme is perhaps not surprising, given their long-standing friendship and correspondence, with Miller also moving to the UK from her native Canada to take an opportunity to study with Finnissey. That we have the titular work of this album as an artistic monument to the collaboration of these two composers and friends is a rare treasure.

Transcription is another thread tying the works on this programme together, though not in the way that we are used to seeing in the tradition of piano music. For Michael Finnissey, the act of transcription is, in itself, composition. In an interview with Cassandra Miller for the CeReNeM Journal in 2017, Finnissey says:

'A transcription is something that you're writing through—and as you're writing through, you're thinking along the way as you go. [...] I wasn't going to transcribe things literally, so that the aim wasn't to produce a 'piano arrangement', and I wasn't going to do just a kind of 'decoration' of the original. I set my mind to actually composing with the material, pretty much as if it were my own, because by the time I'd made the choice of what to do, it becomes like the subject of a [...] portrait. Let's say I decide to make a portrait of you—as a photographer or as a painter—then, of course, you are the subject, and I'm not simply reproducing you if I take a photograph of you: I choose lighting, I choose an angle to photograph you from, because my view of you is not your view.'

Explorations of this process present a revealing cross-section of his oeuvre. The work presented on this album, *RS Geistervariationen* (2021), contains large sections of transcription, namely of Brahms' piano duet *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 23*. These passages of transcribed Brahms are not just simply a reduction from four to two hands, but are melded and fused with Finnissy's own voice, creating ghostly echoes of bygone music, just as the variations themselves are ghosts of the original theme, and Schumann's theme a ghost of something else heard as well. In between variations, a series of Tropes act as musical commentary: these are responses in purely his own language, in which the theme is strung up in constellations of sound, and threads of melody echo and foreshadow. In creating a larger set of variations through placing this piece directly after the original Schumann, we are left with a culmination of *Chor der Geisterstimmen aus der Ferne* [Chorus of ghost-voices from afar], functioning as epilogue and final dissolution of all thematic material.

Variations themselves may be read as a form of transcription through the same process that Finnissy describes above. If *RS Geistervariationen* is portraiture through multiple lenses, Schumann's own *Geistervariationen* (1854) is perhaps journaling. His final work for piano, it was written shortly before his committal at Enderich and during a time of increased bipolar activity. While he was convinced that the theme was heaven-sent, dictated by angels (or perhaps a chorus of ghosts from afar), it was in fact an elaboration on themes he himself had previously written, appearing in his second string quartet and the second movement of his Violin concerto. During the creation of the work Schumann famously threw himself into the Rhine in a suicide attempt, and upon rescue continued his work on the piece right up until his admittance to an asylum. Much of this music contains a grace and simplicity that belies Schumann's state of suffering, until the final variation conjures up the Rhine itself, in a murky, swirling river of dissonance. The music did not appear in print until 1939, with Clara withholding it from publication for perhaps personal reasons, so we have Brahms to thank for bringing the theme to first light in his set of Variations.

Philip the Wanderer (2012) is Cassandra Miller's first published work for solo piano, written for Philip Thomas. The writing of it began in Canada but continued in the UK during a period of mentorship under Finnissy. It draws its source material from *Mandowa II*, a recording by Mozambican musician Zhukake Masingi, of which Miller generated a rhythmically hyper-rigorous computer generated MIDI transcription. Through previous experience learning mbira songs with Zimbabwean-trained

musicians in her hometown in Canada, Miller was able to recognise and filter the looping rhythmic and melodic structures within, and initially simplified the transcription to a spatially-notated version, intending to allow the performer to reapply freely the dancing rhythms themselves. However, upon its first workshop with Philip Thomas, she found that this rhythmic freedom when given to a single performer lacked the vitality that could be found with a group reacting to each other in real time.

'With someone like Philip, who really enjoys working with and against the score, that's where the communication is. I realised that I had got this basic paradigm backwards. I went a few days later to a lesson with Michael [Finnissy] and I showed him both versions. He asked what these MIDI printouts looked like, so I showed him and he looks at it and said "Oh, now I found those rhythms interesting" [...] so him saying that was a really key moment for me in how I thought about transcription. The complication of the subtlety of what that live human is doing is what's interesting.'

The rigorous computer-transcription became the base layer of the music, and with octave transposition of material and the layering of extra melodies that Miller heard naturally popping out of the recording of Mandowa II, the upwards structure of Philip the Wanderer was formed. As the piece progresses through its three movements, the focus shifts from gentle rhythmic rumbblings to the dialogue of these looping melodic calls and scales, including a whistling line in the climactic middle section of the piece. And as the rush builds through the final movement, the dance is transcended and we are left with the simplest of sounds, a repeating scale.

I could write much about Sinner, don't let this harvest pass (2014), about how it was drawn from the old African American spiritual of the same name, and how each movement comments and builds on the previous, but, beautifully, we can instead have the composers themselves speak about it through their correspondence while collaborating on the piece. It is a pleasure to be able to put together these artists on the same programme, which to me feel like such a natural fit, and I hope this music brings as much pleasure to others as it does to me.

Joseph Havlat 2026

Correspondence

Cassandra to Michael (4th August, 2014)

Dearest Michael,
How are you? I hope this email finds you very well...!!

[...]I worked for a few more moments on Angeline the Baker, but found that the kind of work I wanted to do with it (you know, to find a way to capture its lopsided vibrancy) was not something I could finish before August 19th - so I almost wrote to you to say that sadly I would have no short piano piece for you.

But then I kicked myself and decided to do something simpler - so I've gone and written you a little something (attached) that has nothing to do with Angeline, nor the Mazurs, just an arrangement of a tune that I can't get out of my head (an old spiritual called "sinner, please don't let this harvest pass"). I used it as source material for a movement of the waltz collection that I wrote for 7090, but this little piano solo is much changed from that.

I've attached it here - but please please do not feel that 15 days before your cabaret I expect you to play it (you may do whatever you like with it! like it, hate it, feel lukewarm about it, burn it, play it, etc). I just wanted to write it in any case, a lovely way to spend some summer days, mostly in an adirondack chair my brother's back yard. It's been 25 degrees consistently, and I took breaks to swim in lakes.

If you [follow] this link, it should lead you to [a recording] of Marian Anderson singing the tune: <https://youtu.be/n3Q415njosA?si=V3HhJPuaFHxPGkCA>

For visa reasons I won't be arriving in England until September 3rd.... so very sadly I will miss the cabaret altogether. I hope it goes smashingly - I wish I could hear all the little pieces! If they record the show, I'd really love to have a listen... Know that I'll be thinking of you then....

LOVE
Cassandra



Michael to Cassandra (4th August, 2014)

It's FABULOUS.

The whole shape, atmosphere, and a dream to play.

Now, I have to tell you that I was having some trouble with the 'Angeline the Baker' tune (something about the melodic contour). But this one is much more appealing - sort of clunky, and in a key (one sharp) that I haven't used before. Also I like the title better!

So of course it's on the cabaret programme (IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SO UPSETTING NOT TO HAVE HAD SOMETHING OF YOURS THERE WITH ME!!!!!!). And I'll send you my version later in the week.

XXXXX
Michael

Cassandra to Michael (6th August, 2014)

Michael!

I'm so glad you like it - it's just a ditty, nothing sophisticated or even thoughtful and certainly not adventurous or experimental even in the best sense of the word... but well, I'm enjoying writing ditties these days, and whether or not that has any merit it makes me so happy to think you might enjoy playing it. Even happier if you'll write a Marian Anderson piece yourself. Will you? She's... well, anyway I try to finish that sentence is an understatement.

I didn't at all try to capture what it is I like about her (which perhaps I will one day...), instead I just played around with the notes of the tune, they're just so darned great. I mean, such a brilliant 8th scale degree was never heard. SO emphatic and free at the same time, as all hymns should be (but few succeed like this one), the heart just explodes. But if you would write something I feel sure it would say something about why I like her singing, even if that isn't what you intend, I'd hear it in your piece more than I do in mine.... And besides, after the thousands of pieces you've written, you MUST write one in e minor one of these days, it's really the best key out there, a great congregational hymn-range. :)

Interesting that you had trouble with Angeline - I can imagine that - for music like yours, so much about line, to engage with something like Angeline which essentially has no line - hard to know what you would work with there. What do you think? Line-less music is sometimes very good for dancing (instead of concert-sitting). I'm trying to get my head around what that means for my music (since I like dancing too, and don't always want to turn my attention away from my body) so I'm somewhat drawn to the challenge. I think I might send you something of Angeline someday in the end, we'll see.

The email you sent [...] about the cabaret program makes me blush - to be included in a list with such giants, outstanding! Your presence here on this earth continues to give me such joy my friend... thank you for that.... I so very much wish I could be there on the 20th!!

Sending much love from Victoria (where the grass is dry and making the world smell sweet all day/night)

XO Cassandra

Michael to Cassandra (6th August, 2014)

Dear Cassandra,

And I think it is both thoughtful and sophisticated, in the most profound way. So, by my reckoning, these days it is also adventurous and experimental to be thoughtful and sophisticated, as most of what gets played is shallow - even if it is glossy on the surface. Philip Thomas is making the journey from Sheffield to hear it.

Michael to Cassandra (14th August, 2014)

Dear Cassandra,

And you thought that YOU were sailing close to the wind!

I just finished this (enclosed below) at 20:15 local time, and here I am sending you the PDFs an hour later, just a little less than a week before the performance. I am

really pleased with how it turned out: I started with your opening chord (not one I could have dreamt up for myself) and also stole a few more bits of material from you (grace-note Bs) as well as Marian Anderson, and had one or two scrapes along the way:

Having notated the recording at pitch (on my machine it is E-flat minor or, E-flat pentatonic with the piano adding scrunchy harmony), I struggled to get from E to E-flat meaningfully (= in my own sweet way, not following the conventions), and failed several times.

Actually the piece just refused to modulate on the large-scale, so I just let it be (always the best solution), and made the cadence points function as upbeats to the next section.

Anyway, I hope you think it is OK.

I'm going to try playing it directly AFTER yours, and see if people think that way is interesting, or maybe I will put another piece (or two) in between - but they might just work as TWO VERSES.

Philip Thomas is driving over to listen, so he'll probably let you know what he thought.

Lots of love, hoping your summer is still lovely and relaxed.
Michael xx

Cassandra to Michael (25th August, 2014)

Michael!

The day you sent this to me was a very happy one indeed. To get something in your pen with "for cassandra miller" at the end really knocked me over! And what's more, it's a gorgeous piece. And in E or E flat or both actually, very nice keys :) I start to see how you think a bit. This is a fantastic exercise we've started - let's keep at it! My immediate thought was that I should write a verse three (I know that my Redeemer lives) stealing things from your verse, but realized of course that I couldn't finish it in the 4 hours or so before you left for the camp. Also, that would have left one verse hanging yet undone (My God is a mighty man of war) which I'm not sure either one of us would want to tackle?

How was the concert? How were all the little pieces? I received a lovely email from Philip Thomas about the concert, and James Weeks proclaimed on facebook to have liked it very much too (I think it was his birthday, so a good present). I bet the whole week was great - did you have a good time?

MUCH LOVE
xo Cassandra

Cassandra to Michael (4th December, 2014)

Please forgive the idiosyncratic way in which the voices weave around each other... the choices there were usually the least bad that I could think of... It might be somewhat dreadful to read...

I'm quite pleased with it in the end. After trying various fancy things musically, I decided it had to be about line (after your movt2, I couldn't go back to it being about triads) so I stripped it of everything but the first line taken from your last section of movt 2 (without grace notes, and with some octave changes) and then as you will see just upside-down and backwards, and then with the echo that makes little melodies within itself. Et voilà. Tempi are as you please, take what I wrote with as many grains of salt as are fit.

My sincere apologies that this come to you so late... is it too late for the 16th? I hope I haven't muddled your plans..... boooo... Tell me what you think.

I've been playing your Movt4 on the piano at school..... BEAUTIFUL..... you must agree? I think our trajectory 1,2,3,4 makes for a good journey too, let me know what you think of our balance...

love
Cassandra

Michael to Cassandra (4th December, 2014)

Hey! The new section looks yummy, and I will print it out and work on it today and tomorrow. Your syncopated rhythms are interestingly tricky, so I have to get my brain round them, I think they make me a bit nervous, but that is not YOUR problem,

something I have to deal with. It will make a terrific set with the other three, and I will do them all in Birmingham (probably makes about 10 - 12 minutes of music?). I think if I reduce the original tempo of the first section, I can play more clearly and lightly, it needs to dance. Let's see.

About the title:

I am getting a bit fidgety about the word 'please', which seems a bit surplus to requirements (unless beautifully sung by M.A.). Could the title be:

"Sinner, don't let this harvest pass"

?!?!

This seems to have a bit of urgency, and also puts more emphasis on 'harvest' (the harvest being our hard work in this instance!). What do you think?

Michael Finnissy

Cassandra to Michael (8th December, 2014)

Hi dear!

Oh yes absolutely agree with you about the title, very good idea. And it also implies that the music is about more than just quoting a song that already exists... you know, that we might all be sinners, not just quotation artists.

I think we're much longer than 10-12 minutes now... the first two movements on the CoMA video comes to almost 9 minutes, and what I've just given you is (eek) over 7 minutes (according to my computer, with the tempi as marked, which are of course too fast), so with better tempi all round, and adding the last movement, I believe we're up to about 20 !

I hope all is going ok with the #3, it does go on a bit, but then I thought we might all benefit from some patience as listeners... It would have been perhaps more "consequent" to put everything in the same register (without dropping the 8ve between sections), but I just liked them in those registers, consequence be damned.

My question to you is: now that you've had a moment to look at it, does it make sense? I guess what I'm really asking is: do you think that the middle section (the one marked a fictional 88) works, or do you think that it would work just as well or better

to skip straight from the bottom of page 2 to the top of page 4?? Could I leave this up to you?

MUCH LOVE

C

[On discussing the order of movements]

Michael to Cassandra (August 15th, 2016)

I rather like Jonathan [Powell's] idea - do you? CM-MF-MF-CM composer palindrome, or sandwich, it wasn't a permutation I had thought of (slightly resistant to palindromes in composing, but hey!...)

M x

Joseph Havlat

Joseph Havlat is a pianist and composer from Hobart, Australia, based in London. Working as a soloist and chamber musician for music very new, very old and many things in between, he has performed in major concert venues around the UK, Europe, America, Japan and Australia.

As a soloist, Joseph is a leading interpreter of modern and contemporary music, having collaborated with composers such as Hans Abrahamsen, John Adams, Thomas Adès, Gerald Barry, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Brett Dean, Michael Finnissy, Isabella Gellis, Thomas Larcher and Cassandra Miller. Dedicated to the enrichment and promotion of new music, he has given over 120 second performances, and runs an intimate exploratory concert series of contextualised new music at 1901 Arts Club in London, *Points of Departure*. He is in high demand as a chamber musician and works regularly with a host of prominent performers, but collaborates most regularly with mezzo Lotte Betts-Dean and violinist Charlotte Saluste-Bridoux. He has also worked with both the Colin Currie Group, with whom he has released an album of Steve Reich on their own label, and the LSO percussion ensemble, with whom he has released a CD on the LSO Live label, featuring the premiere recording of John Adams' two-piano work 'Roll Over Beethoven'.

As a composer his music often explores the sounds of the natural world imbued with the harsher shapes of human modernity, with a particular focus on his native Tasmania. He has written music spanning from solo voice to large ensemble, including for Ensemble x.y, of which he was a founding member.

Recent CD releases prior to this one include: Finnissy vocal works on Divine Art Métier (with Lotte Betts-Dean), *Les Adieux* for Linn records (Janáček, Prokofiev, Martinů), and Isabella Gellis' *The Dissolute Society Comprised of All Sorts* for Flung.

Joseph studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London under Prof. Joanna MacGregor from 2012 -18, where he received his BMus and MMus with distinction. Since 2019, he has taught both piano and composition there, and became an Associate of the RAM in 2020.

Outside of music, he likes watching cricket and growing ferns.



Joseph Havlat © Ella Pavlides

Cassandra Miller

Dr Cassandra Miller is a Canadian-British composer based in London. Her works are published by Faber Music. Her compositional approach centres on meditation-based, uncontrolled singing as a means of exploring melody and repetition, combined with transcription processes that transform pre-existing musical sources to heighten their expressive and fragile qualities.

Alex Ross, writing in *The New Yorker*, described her music as “uncalculatedly beautiful”. Her *Duet for Cello and Orchestra*, premiered at the Tectonics Festival in 2015 by Charles Curtis with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Ilan Volkov, was later named by *The Guardian* as one of the best classical works of the 21st century. *Round* was premiered in 2016 by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and André de Ridder. Other large-scale works include *A Large House*, performed internationally following its premiere at Ostrava Days.

Miller has worked closely with Quatuor Bozzini, for whom she wrote *Warblework* and *About Bach*, the latter receiving the Jules-Léger Prize for New Chamber Music. She has also received a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Awards for Artists and a second Jules-Léger Prize for *Bel Canto*. Collaborators include Mira Benjamin, Philip Thomas, and Juliet Fraser, with whom she created the Tracery project. Recordings of her work, including portrait discs on Another Timbre, have received wide acclaim.

Recent works include *Thanksong* (2020), *Perfect Offering* (2020), *La Donna* (2021), and the viola concerto *I cannot love without trembling* (2023), written for Lawrence Power and performed internationally, including at the BBC Proms.

Miller studied at the University of Victoria, the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, and the University of Huddersfield, and worked privately with Michael Finnissy. She served as Associate Head of Composition at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (2018–2020) and has been a visiting teacher at institutions including Stanford, Columbia, CalArts, and the Royal Academy of Music. From 2010 to 2013, she was Artistic and General Director of Innovations en concert.

Michael Finnissy

Michael Finnissy was born in the London Borough of Lambeth in March 1946. He was self-taught until 18, listening to Antony Hopkins Talking about Music on the radio on Sunday afternoons, and visiting libraries. He was awarded a Foundation Scholarship to the Royal College of Music, where he studied composition with Bernard Stevens and Humphrey Searle, and piano with Edwin Benbow and Ian Lake, he then studied in Italy with Roman Vlad.

He played for classes and taught Music at the London School of Contemporary Dance, and then at Chelsea School of Art, Winchester College and Dartington Summer School. He was also musician in residence to the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, and to the City of Caulfield in Australia. He has worked with the East London Late Starters' Orchestra, and CoMA (Contemporary Music for All) since their inception in the mid-1980s.

In 1990 Finnissy was appointed President of the International Society for Contemporary Music, re-elected in 1993 and made an honorary member of the ISCM in 1998. In 1999 he was appointed Senior Fellow of the KBC 'chair in New Music' at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, and later that year was made Professor of Composition at the University of Southampton.

He has been featured composer at the Huddersfield, Bath, and Almeida Festivals in the UK, at Harvard's Gay and Lesbian Caucus, at the Sydney Mardi Gras, at Spectrum (New York), at the Summer Institute of Contemporary Performance Practice (SICPP) in the New England Conservatory (Boston), 'Time of Music' in Finland, the Borealis Festival in Bergen (Norway) and at 'Finnissy Weekends' in Maastricht, and for the BMIC Cutting Edge.

He has written three evening-length stage-works for small forces: Undivine Comedy (for 2 singers, actor and ensemble), Therese Raquin (for 4 singers and piano), and Mankind (for baritone, 5 actors, 5 musicians and small chorus), a large number of songs and solo instrumental works, choral music, music for string quartet, piano trio and piano quartet, five piano concertos, and five 'epic' cycles for solo piano: Verdi Transcriptions, Gershwin Arrangements, Folklore, The History of Photography in Sound, and the 4-volume Klavierübung.



Cassandra Miller © Benjamin Ealovega



Michael Finnissy

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