

Arthur Levering is a musical mosaicist, creating patterns within patterns whose meanings change with the perspective of the listener. Moments of piquant color and gesture engage us on one level, but over time, and in combination with other such ideas they spin out the broad narrative, the winsome or lacerating or warm or athletic trajectory of phrase and episode. The works on this new collection—for orchestra, string orchestra, large mixed ensemble, small ensemble with voice, and for two pianos—cover a wide expressive and technical range, but the composer’s elegant and rigorous use of patterns and their transformations is a consistent source of rich and vibrant energy.

Levering began his musical life as a guitarist primarily interested in rock music. He gradually expanded his stylistic capabilities and switched to classical guitar, almost by accident, at Colby College in Maine. He went on to earn his classical guitar performance degree at Yale working with Eliot Fisk. Although for some time he performed throughout the country in a guitar/lute duo, his focus shifted to composition. He ultimately studied composition with Bernard Rands at Boston University, where he earned his master’s degree. He has since become widely recognized as a composer, earning commissions and performances from a wide variety of ensembles and organizations including the Fromm and Guggenheim foundations. Since spending a year at the American Academy in Rome with the Rome Prize fellowship, he has divided his time between there and Cambridge, Massachusetts.

It’s tempting to trace Levering’s fascination with repeating patterns to the figurations so idiomatic for the guitar—repeated arpeggio patterns through static and changing harmonies—but while the physical nature of performance is critical in developing musicality, the guitar’s techniques are too specific to suggest much more than a cursory connection. (Interestingly, the instrument has figured rarely in his mature output.) Various other influences—probably more salient—can be felt: rock music, with its ever-present pulse and energy, but also Baroque music, minimalism, and Indonesian gamelan. Particular composers, too, might be cited—Franco Donatoni, Luciano Berio, György Ligeti. Still, Levering’s work has its own distinctive sense of wit, its own pacing, and particular tendencies of instrumental color—its own voice.

Like many of Levering’s works, *Furies* resides in the realm of the tone poem, a musical reaction to extramusical impressions. *Il Mare Dentro* also lives here; the title of *Parallel Universe* is more a poetic representation of a musical abstraction. *Furies* shares its harmonic world and some of its material with the *Partite sopra Ciaccona* for two pianos.

The opening bars of *Furies* (2006), which the composer describes as “rather menacing” and which suggested its title, is an unusual sound in Levering’s music—somewhat amorphous and fixed in the bass register. (“Amorphous” is the last thing one expects from this composer.) Running through this passage, though, are unevenly spaced accented pitches, which presage the sharply rhythmic aspects of the rest of the piece. The process of clarification is gradual: the vibes enter with chords, then the texture opens up in complex counterpoint, divergent instrumental lines coinciding in accented highlights. The highlights, taken as a continuity, describe a melody (compare to the *Partite*, ca. 1:05, for an example of Levering’s cross-pollination). Eventually each beat settles into quintuplet groups; later in the piece we encounter repeating groups of four, six, and nine. The rhythmic and harmonic processes established here cause even radically different passages later in the work to seem inevitable. In particular, there are extreme changes in ensemble density, such as the multi-tempo piano solo beginning ca. 3:40 (again, hear the *Partite* at

ca. 2:38.) The interrupting three-part woodwind passage representing the Furies is each time a little different and always surprising. It has the raw, rough texture of certain Greek folk music and recalls the ancient double-reed aulos. Following its last appearance, bass drum temporarily intensifies the menace but the dissipation into the treble range, with glockenspiel and piano, seems to signal their transformation from revengeful to mollified, Furies to Eumenides.

Two orchestral works—relatively rare among Levering’s pieces—are in this collection: *Parallel Universe* for string orchestra and *Il Mare Dentro* for full orchestra. As the composer relates, *Il Mare Dentro* (“The Sea Within”) (2008) was triggered by memories of the sea. Among the present works, it ranges furthest in its expressive and musical content; in spite of being only nine minutes long, it nonetheless captures a sense of expansiveness. Levering emphasizes the mutability of the sea, from still and calm to powerful and threatening; there are evolution and transformation but also sudden, unexpected shifts, more radical and more frequent than most of what we find in *Furies*. Suggestions of change-within-continuity abound: the opening presents immediately a canon (one instrument “following” another with the same melody) among the sparkling trio of piano, vibraphone, and celesta. A melody in flute and glockenspiel (aided by piano) floats over this pulsing, active music. The melody idea will recur later, about halfway through the piece, with the flute shifting to piccolo.

We encounter a variety of pulse types in *Il Mare Dentro*—steady-state foundations of sound and harmony, active figuration, and unpredictable, accented splashes. Note the piano’s repeating figure at ca. 1:30, with gradually encroaching strings and then a series of bursts, like breaking waves: this passage serves as a kind of ritornello, occurring three times in the piece. The sustained, slow-moving textures of strings (suggesting a kinship with the *Farben* movement of Schoenberg’s Five Pieces for Orchestra, a Debussy-influenced movement purportedly about a lake), provide significant contrast to the more rhythmically active passages. The combination of repeating figures with sustained chords, particularly with the filling-out of the bass register, beginning about 6:15 is positively protean in its suggestion of the sea’s power. The brilliant series of mini-climaxes toward the end of the piece includes Levering’s nod to Debussy’s *La Mer*.

The four *Drinking Songs* (2005) are exceptional in Levering’s catalog in being a work for voice; they also make use of music from early in his career. Each is built from interlocking cycles of small motifs in the accompanying music of two harps and two pianos, and there is a sense of progression through the four songs, from the simplest to the most complex in structure and harmony. The accompaniment in the Yeats setting “A Drinking Song” takes eight pitches (the equivalent of an E-flat major scale) and spins them out in a series of unequal, overlapping phrases. The chords formed by the contrapuntal texture aren’t functional in a European harmonic sense—instead we have a steady-state presence of the entire scale. The vocal part, by contrast, is sustained and connected, and although mostly diatonic (occurring within one scale) it includes one chromatic pitch near the beginning. “Potatores Exquisiti” (“Consummate Drinkers”) a 13th-century Latin toast from Bavaria, is explicitly gamelan-like, with multiple layers of tempo and phrase length and, for the most part, a pentatonic (five-pitch) harmonic profile. A “modulation” of sorts occurs about a minute into the piece (D-natural in the scale changing to D-flat), which in context becomes an event. The soprano again has a single “chromatic” pitch, lowering the expected G to G-flat on the word “dormiant”—“sleep” (this happens again in the following phrase). “Le Vin Perdu” has a more episodic structure in four parts, a recitative-like passage alternating with a song-like passage. Unlike the stable harmonic worlds of the first two songs, “Le Vin Perdu” cycles through a series of four-pitch chords. At the start of the last song,

“Dronken,” the ensemble of two harps and two pianos sounds positively orchestral, becoming more transparent as the voice enters. The glittering instrumental haze creates the environment of confused but pleasant inebriation. Levering also uses glissandi and other small details of articulation to sketch the singer’s drunken state.

Partite sopra Ciaccona (2011) for two pianos demonstrates several ideas basic to Levering’s music. “*Partite*” in Baroque terminology essentially means “suite,” suggesting several different musical characters within the larger piece; “*Ciaccona*,” or chaconne, is a musical form of variations over a repeating cycle of chords, as in the chaconne from Bach’s D minor Partita for solo violin, or the finale of Brahms’s Fourth Symphony. The overall form is similar to the theme-and-variations based on a chord progression in *Parallel Universe*; the series of harmonies here is the same as that of *Furies*, with which it shares substantial passages. Each variation is distinctive but they coalesce into larger sections as well, essentially three loud, energetic sections separated by more introspective ideas. The work requires a high level of sympathy and interaction between the two pianists: sometimes they’re called upon to create a single big sound-source, but as frequently they have intricately interlocking, rhythmically complex patterns. Some of the most aggressive music in this collection—some of the most aggressive music in Levering’s entire output—can be found in the closing variation, a tribute to the reputations of the two Boston-based pianists for whom the piece was written, Donald Berman and John McDonald.

Parallel Universe (2004) is a work for virtuoso string orchestra: it treats each string section (and division within sections) soloistically in creating its intricate contrapuntal textures. Levering tells us that the piece is a kind of theme and variations with constant reference to a series of chords (presented beginning at ca. 0:40). The introduction sets up contrast both horizontally—from measure to measure—and vertically, layering an insistent eighth-note figure with its large-interval leaps against long, sustained notes. Throughout the piece these two approaches vie for the foreground, the resulting emphasis informing the character of the variations. For example, after two rhythmically active variations, the third (ca. 3:30) relies on dovetailing harmonies gradually shading from one to the next (a point of comparison with *Il Mare Dentro*). Despite the duality of approach, the constant flow of one idea to another lends a sense of organic growth and transformation to the whole, with one major disruption—an explicit recollection of the chordal theme—in the final variation.

—Robert Kirzinger

Robert Kirzinger is a composer and writer based in Boston. He is on the staff of the Boston Symphony Orchestra as an annotator, editor, and lecturer, and teaches occasionally at Northeastern University.

Composer’s note

Furies (2006)

When I first decided to call my piece *Furies*, I had in mind the opening passage: slow, quiet, but rather menacing. By the end of the composition I was ambivalent about the title—perhaps my piece was just not “furious” enough. In Greek and Roman mythology, the Furies (or Erinyes, the angry ones) were avenging goddesses who punished crimes out of reach of human justice. While researching the subject, however, I found several myths portraying the Furies in a less than furious light. They wept when they heard Orpheus implore the deities of the underworld to restore Eurydice to life. Another story describes how they relentlessly pursued Orestes, who

avenged his father Agamemnon's murder by killing Clytemnestra, his mother. The Furies were persuaded to abandon their pursuit of Orestes after he was acquitted by an Athenian council. The verdict calmed the anger of the Furies and their name was changed to Eumenides (the soothed ones). Maybe these goddesses, if not exactly the friendly type, were more nagging in nature. Their number being three (Alecto, Megaera, and Tisiphone), I chose a very nagging passage of three-part imitative counterpoint in the winds (heard three times in the course of the work) to represent them. The piece is based on a series of sixteen five-note chords, clearly presented in the opening sections, and it works its way by rising 4th/falling 5th through all possible transpositions of the thematic material with only occasional detours along the way. *Furies* was commissioned by the New York ensemble Sequitur.

Il Mare Dentro (the sea within) (2008)

Some of my earliest childhood memories are of the sea and I feel a very strong sense of nostalgia for those days (and when I was older, occasionally nights) frolicking in and beneath the waves. I began writing this piece during a long, hot summer of swimming in 2007; I reconnected with those childhood memories of the sea and this title came to mind. Although there is no explicit program, this brief orchestral work has what I would describe as a lot of “watery” figures. Structurally, the piece is built on sixteen chords derived from a passage of four-part counterpoint (heard at the start). Water gurgles, waves crash, sea gulls cry, fog horns blare, but just in case the allusion to the sea is still not clear enough, I also quoted (near the end of the piece) a few measures from the second movement (*Jeux de vagues*) of Debussy's *La mer*. (I also couldn't resist including the quote from *La mer* as an “inside” joke on the title). *Il Mare Dentro* was commissioned by the Boston Modern Orchestra Project.

Drinking Songs (2005)

The four *Drinking Songs* represent something of a detour from my recent musical path—they are more tonal and minimalist than anything I've written since my student days (and in fact, parts of songs 1, 2, and 4 are reworked from various pieces of that period). I responded to these poems with simple, child-like melodies and uncomplicated settings. The poignant little Yeats poem is set to a short, repeated phrase of ten-part counterpoint in a gently swaying habanera. To the formal Latin text of “Potatores Exquisiti,” I added something resembling traditional Indonesian gamelan (emphasizing the idea of “ritual”). “Le Vin Perdu” is based on a series of seven four-note chords, while the very expressive Middle-English poem “Dronken” uses driving motoric rhythms to finish out the set. I wish to thank my scholarly friend Gordon Harvey for his invaluable aid in finding numerous poems on the subject (and for sharing his home-brewed beer and fine scotch).

Partite sopra Ciaccona (2011)

My short piece for two pianos, *Partite sopra Ciaccona* (Italian for “divisions (or variations) over a chaconne”) shares its basic thematic material with another work on this CD, *Furies* for eleven players. The reuse of prior music is not unusual for me, but it has most often consisted of re-orchestration: presenting the same music in a new instrumentation, recomposing where necessary. In this case however, it is primarily just the theme (a series of sixteen five-note chords) that is common to both works. Though the initial variations and two slow sections are similar, the *Partite* veer off in radically different directions from their larger (and somewhat longer) predecessor. The piece is dedicated to the performers on this recording, Donald Berman and John McDonald, and was made possible by a grant from the Fromm Music Foundation.

Parallel Universe (2004)

In the simplest sense, *Parallel Universe* is a theme and variations based on a set of sixteen four-note chords. After a brief introduction, this chord series is heard in its entirety in the upper strings over three-part imitative counterpoint. A low groaning chord is sounded by the cellos and double basses, abruptly signaling an entirely different approach to the material. The first variation which follows is a kind of fantasia on the intervals of the opening chord. As the variations proceed I try to allude in some way to either the initial presentation of the theme or to the alternate, less traditional approach of the first variation (and the low groaning chord sometimes serves to signal the switch from one “universe” to the other).

A Drinking Song (W. B. Yeats, 1910)

Wine comes in at the mouth
And love comes in at the eye;
That's all we shall know for truth
Before we grow old and die.
I lift the glass to my mouth,
I look at you, and I sigh.

Potatores Exquisiti (To You, Consummate Drinkers) (Anon., 13th c., Bavaria)

Potatores exquisiti,	To you, consummate drinkers,
licet sitis sine siti,	Though little be your drought,
et bibatis expediti	Good speed be to your tankards,
et scyphorum inobliti,	And send the wine about.
scyphi crebro repetiti	Let not the full decanter
non dormiant,	Sleep on its round,
et sermones inauditi	And may unheard of banter
prosiliant.	In wit abound.

Translation by Helen Waddell. From *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, published by Four Courts Press.
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Le Vin Perdu (The Lost Wine) (Paul Valéry, 1922)

J'ai, quelque jour, dans l'Océan,	Once on a day, in the open sea
(Mais je ne sais plus sous quels cieux),	(Under what skies I cannot recall),
Jeté, comme offrande au néant,	I threw, as oblation to vacancy,
Tout un peu de vin précieux. . .	More than a drop of precious wine. . .
Qui voulut ta perte, ô liqueur?	Who decreed your waste, oh potion?
J'obéis peut-être au devin?	Did I perhaps obey some divine?
Peut-être au souci de mon coeur,	Or else the heart's anxiety,
Songeant au sang, versant le vin?	Dreaming blood, spilling the wine?

Sa transparence accoutumée Its habitual clarity
Après une rose fumée After a mist of rosiness
Reprit aussi pure la mer. . . Returned as pure again to the sea. . .

Perdu ce vin, ivres les ondes! . . . The wine lost, drunken the waves! . . .
J'ai vu bondir dans l'air amer I saw leaping in the salt air
Les figures les plus profondes. . . Shapes of the utmost profundity. . .

Translation by David Paul. From *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Vol. 1: Poems*. Copyright Princeton University Press. Used by permission.

Dronken (Anon. 14th c., England)

D. . . dronken—
Dronken, dronken, idronken—
. . . dronken is Tabart atte^o wine. with
Hay. . . suster,^o Walter, Peter, sister
Ye dronke^o all depe,^o drank/deeply
And I shulle eke!^o also
Stondet^o alle stille— stand
Stille, stille, stille—
Stondet alle stille—
Stille as any ston;
Trippe a lutel^o with thy feet, little
And let thy body go

Arthur Levering (b. 1953) has received many awards for his work including the Rome Prize, the Heckscher Foundation Composition Prize, the Lee Ettelson Composer's Award, commissions from the Fromm Foundation and the Barlow Endowment, as well as fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the MacDowell Colony, and Yaddo. He has been commissioned by various ensembles including the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Boston Musica Viva, New Juilliard Ensemble, Dinosaur Annex Music Ensemble, Sequitur, Musica d'Oggi (Italy), and the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet (Germany). His music has also been performed by such prominent groups as the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the League of Composers/ISCM, Voices of Change, NewEar, and Lontano, among others, and has been featured at concerts and festivals in Britain, France, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. Compact discs of his work include *School of Velocity* (New World Records/CRI) and *Still Raining, Still Dreaming* (New World Records).

The **Boston Modern Orchestra Project** (BMOP) is the premiere orchestra in the United States dedicated exclusively to commissioning, performing, and recording music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Its signature record label, BMOP/sound, is the nation's foremost label launched by an orchestra and devoted exclusively to new-music recordings. Under the leadership of its founder and artistic director Gil Rose, BMOP's unique programming and high

performance standards have attracted critical acclaim and earned the orchestra fifteen ASCAP awards for adventurous programming as well as the John S. Edwards Award for Strongest Commitment to New American Music.

Sequitur first performed in New York City in 1997, offering a program that featured premieres by David Lang and Frederic Rzewski and that signaled its mission: to explore music's connections with text and theater. Since that time its directors, pianist Sara Laimon and composer Harold Meltzer, have led the group to commission and premiere dozens of scores from composers as diverse as Eve Beglarian, Martin Bresnick, David Del Tredici, Bun-Ching Lam, Tania León, David Rakowski, Scott Wheeler, and Judith Weir. Sequitur is well known for its three cabarets on Money, Love, and Power that first came to life at Joe's Pub and at The Knitting Factory. The group has released seven recordings on the Albany Records and Koch labels, including discs devoted to music of Eric Moe and Lewis Spratlan.

Pianist **Donald Berman** is recognized as a chief exponent of new works by living composers, overlooked music by twentieth-century masters, and recitals that link classical and modern repertoires. His two-volume *The Unknown Ives* and *The Uncovered Ruggles* represent the only recordings of the complete short piano works of Charles Ives and Carl Ruggles extant. Other recordings include the 4-CD set *Americans in Rome: Music by Fellows of the American Academy in Rome*, *The Light That Is Felt: Songs of Charles Ives* (with soprano Susan Narucki), *Wasting the Night: Songs of Scott Wheeler* and CDs of music by Su Lian Tan, Arthur Levering, Martin Boykan, Tamar Diesendruck, and Aaron Jay Kernis.

Paul Hostetter is the Ethel Foley Distinguished Chair in Orchestral Activities for the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University. He has conducted the New York City Opera, the Opera Theatre of Pittsburgh, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, the Orlando Philharmonic, the American Composers Orchestra, Philharmonia Virtuosi, the Naples Philharmonic, the Syracuse Symphony, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, and the Delaware Symphony Orchestra, among many others. His forty-nine commercially released recordings have received honors including a Grammy Award, a Downbeat Critics Award, five stars for performance in the BBC Music Magazine, and two NY Times Top Five annual listings.

Harpist **Franziska Huhn** has given numerous solo recitals throughout the United States as well as international recitals including several performances for the German president. In 2005, Ms. Huhn became the first-ever harpist to be awarded the Artist's Diploma by the New England Conservatory. In 2007, her album *Harp Solo* was released. Ms. Huhn serves as harp faculty at the New England Conservatory, the Longy School of Music, the Boston University Tanglewood Institute Harp Seminar, and the Connecticut Valley Harp Intensive Summer Course.

John McDonald is a composer who tries to play the piano and a pianist who tries to compose. He is Professor of Music and Music Department Chair at Tufts University, where he teaches composition, theory, and performance. His output concentrates on vocal, chamber, and solo instrumental works, and includes interdisciplinary experiments.

Mezzo-soprano **Krista River** has appeared as a soloist with the Boston Symphony, the Santa Fe Symphony, Handel & Haydn Society, the Florida Orchestra, the Charlotte Symphony, Boston

Baroque, Emmanuel Music, the North Carolina Symphony, and the Pittsburgh Bach and Baroque Ensemble. She was a winner of the 2004 Concert Artists Guild International Competition and a 2007 Sullivan Foundation grant recipient. Ms. River began her musical career as a cellist, earning her music degree at St. Olaf College. She resides in Boston and is a regular soloist with Emmanuel Music's renowned Bach Cantata Series.

A native New Yorker, harpist **Amanda Romano** debuted as a soloist at the age of fifteen in Alice Tully Hall. She has performed in Carnegie Hall, Merkin Hall, Jordan Hall, and the Kennedy Center, among others. Ms. Romano holds positions with the Boston Philharmonic and Atlantic Symphony. She was a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center and has participated in the Klangspuren Festival, Monadnock Music Festival, Assisi Music Festival, and International Festival of Contemporary Performance. Ms. Romano received her Masters at Boston University and Bachelors at New England Conservatory, studying with former principal Boston Symphony Orchestra harpist, Ann Hobson Pilot.

Conductor **Gil Rose's** dynamic performances and many recordings have garnered international critical praise. In addition to leading the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, he has guest conducted the Netherlands Radio Symphony, the American Composers Orchestra, the Warsaw Philharmonic, and the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, among many others. Maestro Rose has also built a reputation as one of the country's most inventive and versatile opera conductors, having led Opera Boston for almost ten years. He recently announced the formation of Odyssey Opera, a company dedicated to presenting eclectic operatic repertoire in a variety of formats. In 2012, Maestro Rose assumed the position of Artistic Director of Monadnock Music. He is a recipient of Columbia University's Ditson Award, as well as an ASCAP Concert Music award for exemplary commitment to new American music. He is a three-time Grammy Award nominee.

Scott Wheeler has conducted more than 100 premieres with the Boston ensemble Dinosaur Annex, which he co-founded. As a conductor and composer he has appeared on Naxos, Bridge, and many other labels. His works have been commissioned by the Washington National Opera, the Metropolitan Opera, soprano Renée Fleming, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Marilyn Horne Foundation, and many orchestras in the United States and Europe. He teaches at Emerson College in Boston.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

School of Velocity. Donald Berman, piano; Dinosaur Annex Music Ensemble, Scott Wheeler, conductor. New World Records/CRI NWCR 812.

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Furies

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Il Mare Dentro

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Drinking Songs

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Parallel Universe

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Francis Goelet (1926–1998), *In Memoriam*

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Parallel Universe

80750-2

1. *Furies* (2006) 10:13

Sequitur: Erin Lesser, flute; Jacqueline LeClair, oboe; Jo-Ann Sternberg, clarinet; Philip Everall, bass clarinet; Peggy Kampmeier, piano; Matthew Gold, percussion; Andrea Schulz, violin; Miranda Cuckson, violin; Daniel Panner, viola; Greg Hesselink, cello; Jeremy McCoy, bass; Paul Hostetter, conductor

2. *Il Mare Dentro* (2008) 9:15

Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Gil Rose, conductor

Drinking Songs (2005) 12:13

3. A Drinking Song 1:59

4. Potatoes Exquisiti 3:57

5. Le Vin Perdu 2:47

6. Dronken 3:18

Krista River, mezzo-soprano; Franziska Huhn, Amanda Romano, harps; Donald Berman, John McDonald, pianos; Scott Wheeler, conductor

7. *Partite sopra Ciaccona* (2011) 9:40

Donald Berman, John McDonald, pianos

8. *Parallel Universe* (2004) 11:25

Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Gil Rose, conductor

TT: 52:59

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