

The works included in this album share more than it appears from details like instrumentation, the general period of composition, and even the remarkable geographical concentration of their authors (at least at the time of composition). An intricate network of personal connections bonds the composers and performers: guitarist James Moore and violinist Andie Springer, who had begun collaborating while performing in Richard Maxwell's theater piece *Neutral Hero* in 2011, are both alums of the Bang on a Can Summer Festival at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Arts. During the mid-2000s, Moore met and began collaborating with composers Paula Matthusen, Lainie Fefferman, and Ken Thomson, a member of the Institute's faculty. Bang on a Can is only one of the many settings that contribute to the vibrancy of the contemporary music scene on the East Coast: it should come as no surprise that all of the above-mentioned people, at one point or another, have called Brooklyn home.

In such fertile environments, the possibilities for collaboration, fellowship, and friendship were plentiful, and roles were often switched among performers, composers, and supporters. One example: in November 2009, composer Larry Polansky took part as a fretless guitarist in a concert of music by Los Angeles-based composers at The Stone, John Zorn's curatorial space in New York's East Village. During rehearsals he noticed Moore's resonator guitar—an instrument rarely seen outside of Americana settings—and the rest, as is often the case when two self-identifying guitar nerds meet one another, is history.

Even Robert Ashley, who may seem the outlier in this lineup, ties into the picture in an intimate way: Ashley was Andie's Uncle Bob, his wife Mimi Johnson (director of the Lovely Music label) her maternal aunt. Andie's contact with Ashley predates her interest and activities as a contemporary musician: she remembers being wowed, but also puzzled, by a stage production of his opera *eL/Aficionado* in Santa Fe, New Mexico, when she was around nine years old. As such, their relationship was based on unassuming familiarity, especially after she moved to New York for her graduate studies at NYU, and Bob and Mimi's apartment became the occasional destination for holidays and family reunions. Eventually Andie became increasingly conscious of her uncle's position in recent music history; in April 2014, a month after Ashley's passing, she participated in the premiere production of his final opera, *Crash*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

This tapestry of personal connections represents the necessary premise that allows for each piece of music to come into being, and imbues each performance with a warm collegiality. Though the following paragraphs may sometimes focus on more strictly technical aspects, we should keep the origins of each piece in mind as we listen. After all, as Fefferman suggests in an essay about her series of *Portrait Pieces*, music sometimes sounds better when it is performed by one's friends.

Larry Polansky's extensive catalogue can be divided according to several conceptual—and often overlapping—categories. Many of his pieces explore rational tunings, often employing changing, simultaneously-sounding ones; vernacular references, ranging from jazz standards to Shaker hymns and Yiddish songs, are abundant; and algorithmic procedures, whether computerized or developed by hand, often guide the unfolding of the music. *10 Strings (9 Events)* (2011) exemplifies all of these coexisting preoccupations.

This piece is part of a set of works that explores Polansky's idea of morphing, a kind of procedure in which a "source" musical element is gradually transformed into its "target" through a series of intermediate iterations. Morphing can encompass melodies (as in *The Casten Variations* or *51 Melodies*), harmonies and tunings (see for instance the many pieces of the *Psaltery* set), or sound events. Here the transformation occurs between an original ostinato pattern, which repeats to act as structural scaffolding, and a number of musical items—the titular "nine events"—such as single pitches, aggregates, melodic fragments, or silences, which the performers can insert ad libitum within the repeated ostinato, eventually replacing the repetitive texture with an irregular one.

The unmistakably brash sound of the resophonic guitar provides an immediate connection to many American vernacular genres. This timbral element is further highlighted by Polansky's specification that the initial ostinato in *10 Strings* should be played as a combination of open strings and double- or triple-stops on the low strings (easily obtained by fretting/depressing the strings perpendicularly at a given position). In combination with the harmonic-based tuning of the open strings (which evokes those of lap steel and Dobro guitars in country and bluegrass circles, though involving much higher primes in this case), these idiomatic choices result in a driving, gritty, yet glowing sonority, a fittingly contrasting canvas for the much more diaphanous quality of the intervening events. A graceful coda, played entirely in harmonics of D, signals the completion of the process, and provides a natural bridge to the next composition on the record, which centers around the same pitch.

Paula Matthusen's *in absentia* (2008) features an electronic accompaniment that gradually becomes more harmonically complex, rising through the first eleven harmonics over the fundamental, before settling on a simpler open fourth (A–D, three octaves above). Over the still harmonic canvas, only marginally disrupted by the beating tones from a pair of closely-tuned crystal glasses, guitar and violin weave a filigree of sustained tones, fragmented melodies, and feeble harmonics.

As with other pieces by the composer, the physical elements of sound are harnessed to explore perceptual and psychoacoustic connections. In this case, as Matthusen explains in her notes, the piece "examines by way of sonic resonance ideas of memory, and how repetition of the facets of the remembered may eventually create its own patterns in absence of the thing remembered." In live performance, the idea of absence is represented by the inconspicuous deployment of the electronic part, which should use a system small enough to be mounted on the back of the guitar, thus remaining hidden from view and blending with the instrument's own resonance.

The piece also reflects Matthusen's own experience: *in absentia* was among the first pieces she composed after leaving Berlin, where she worked in the electronic music studios of the Universität der Künste on a Fulbright Fellowship from 2005–2007, and reflects the realization that leaving from and returning to a place (with all of its accompanying memories, connections, and experiences) are two unique and often irreconcilable experiences. Originally commissioned by violinist Daniella Strasfogel and pianist Clemens Hund-Göschels, it was adapted for guitar and violin on occasion of James and Andie's inaugural tour in 2011.

The title of this album, *Gertrudes*, alludes to Gertrude Stein, author of the three poems that served as an inspiration and title to **James Moore's** compositions included therein. These pieces, each a single page in length, function as springboards for improvisation, the notation oscillating between being fully specified and merely indicative of gesture and contour. The format brings to

mind the notation of John Zorn's *The Book of Heads*, a set of thirty-five etudes, most consisting of a single staff of minuscule notation incorporating graphical and short-hand elements; this really comes as no surprise, given Moore's extensive experience performing this and several other works of Zorn's, both as a soloist and in ensembles like the electric guitar quartet Dither.

Suspicious (2015) (whose text reads "He was suspicious of it and he had every reason to be suspicious of it.") opens with prescribed "horrible, scratchy sound" from the violin, and pipe-cleaner scrapings on the low strings of the guitar, to appropriately unnerving effect. The two musicians move in loosely synchronized unison, generating an intriguing kind of heterophony as they move in and out of notated and improvised sections. In *Look Like* (2014) ("Look like look like it and he had twenty and more than twenty of them too. The great question is is it easier to have more than were wanted and in that case what do they do with it.") the heterophonic texture returns, this time in the context of more conventional pitched writing. The instruments shadow one another, as the music rises and falls in a series of rhythmically steady see-saw patterns. The last piece in the set, *A Wish* (2014) ("And always not when absently enough and heard and said. He had a wish.") strikes a whimsical medium between its precedents, featuring both pitched and unpitched sounds, extreme scordatura (the lowest string of the guitar is dropped down a sixth from E to a G), and glowing harmonic consonances, before the final gesture in the violin suggests a stratospheric takeoff.

The music of composer and multi-instrumentalist **Ken Thomson** often elicits comparisons to his own energetic stage presence, whether he is performing as a member of the Bang on a Can All-Stars, with the punk/chamber/jazz crossover band Gutbucket, or leading the Asphalt Orchestra, an eclectic marching band self-described as "an outdoor guerrilla musical force." The opening of *Deafening Irrelevance* (2011), with a solo of stabbing guitar dyads, would seem to lean in a similar high-octane direction; as the piece unfolds, however, contrasting settings and intricate subtleties uncover additional layers to the overall form. Despite his genre-bending musical activities, in fact, Thomson's compositions tend to eschew overt idiomatic allusions in favor of a more abstract harnessing of the raw elements of music.

A repeat of the incipit is marked by the entrance of the violin, whose more continuous if mercurial lines provide the irregular accents of the guitar with a new context. Eventually the tempo relents a bit, offering a modicum of respite to listeners and performers alike; the violin's lines relax, and the guitar accompaniment recedes into a dogged background ostinato. Once everyone has had a chance to catch their breath, the energy revs back up in a long, protracted climax that pushes the violin to the extreme of its range, first in long tones, and then in frenetic sixteenthths. After an abrupt pause, the final section of the piece emerges akin to a ringing in our ears. Violin and guitar slide slowly between pitches, approximating the contours of each other's lines in a kind of loose invertible counterpoint.

Thomson's title alludes to his concept of the piece as a sort of primal scream, a guttural expression of his frustrations with the loudness and short-sightedness of the contemporary world. From a musical standpoint, we can trace these expressive concerns to explicit compositional choices, such as the enthusiastic embracing of the resophonic guitar's explosive attack and ability to cut through, and more generally in the challenging nature of the writing, meant to push the performers to the limits of what he refers to as the "just barely possible."

When Springer joined **Lainie Fefferman**'s post-classical chamber band Phthia (also featuring Moore on guitar and banjo, clarinetist Sara Budde, and Missy Mazzoli and Mila Henry on melodica), the composer wrote the aptly-titled *Fiddly Tune* (2012) as a welcome piece for the newest member. Eventually Andie and James reworked the piece for their duo project, distilling it down to its essential components. *Fiddly Tune* begins with an improvisation that gradually coalesces into a theme from an imaginary tradition, its Dorian color evocative of Celtic idioms. Two-against-three polyrhythms (both between and within the instrumental parts) explode the surface simplicity into kaleidoscopic metrical patterns; the same concept translates to timbre and texture in the final section, when the players double their parts by vocalizing a monosyllabic chant.

Until 2010, **Robert Ashley**'s only work for solo violin (or other bowed string instrument) was *How Can I Tell the Difference* (Version 2), written in 1972 when he was the director of the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College. This piece uses electronically reversed reverberations, controlled by the performer, to replicate the striking effect of hearing a motorcycle approach through a network of tunnels, which had been built by the U.S. Army in the San Francisco Bay Area as a possible evacuation route in case of a Pacific invasion. The sound of the incoming motor dovetailed seamlessly with the decay of one of the tunnel's steel doors slamming shut, which Ashley had been attempting to capture, fascinated by its long decay.

Nearly forty years later, the composer responded to Andie's inquiry about other solo violin music with the offer to write a new piece. *For Andie Springer Showing the Form of a Melody, "Standing in the Shadows,"* by Robert Ashley (2010) opens with a rhythmic recitation of the entire title, a device that brings to mind Ashley's long-standing interest in the intrinsic musical qualities of everyday speech. Subsequently, the piece unfolds as eight sections, each sixteen bars in length, gradually sounding out a lilting melody in 3|4, accompanied in this recording by a bowed ostinato downbeat on guitar. The score prescribes that the violin should play downbows with "the quality of a sigh," and upbows characterized by a feeling of anticipation. This rhythmic device references the playing style of an old-fashioned waltz, the kind that might have been played by the composer's grandmother, whom he remembers as "a porch violinist." The element of nostalgia is furthered by the prescription to play in an intimate yet unaffected manner, as if performing for private enjoyment. The shorter, "encore" version of the piece, which is built of consecutively transposed fragments from the final section of the piece, can optionally be performed immediately following applause, and functions here as a fitting close to this collection of personal musical moments.

—Giacomo Fiore

Giacomo Fiore is an Italian-born guitarist and musicologist who lives in San Francisco. He teaches a broad range of historical and critical courses at the San Francisco Conservatory, the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the University of San Francisco.

Longtime friends and collaborators **James Moore and Andie Springer** enjoy active careers as performers in New York's thriving creative-music scene. James and Andie began performing as a duo in 2011 while on tour with playwright Richard Maxwell's *Neutral Hero*, an acclaimed theater production for which they were onstage multi-instrumentalists and actors. Traveling to cities in Belgium, France, Austria, Germany, The Netherlands, Ireland, Canada, and the United

States, James and Andie saw the opportunity to bring a new project on the road with them. They assembled a repertoire of contemporary compositions by their friends and colleagues, all written or adapted for the duo and their unconventional instrumentation of violin and steel-string resonator guitar. Rehearsing in hotel rooms between long travel days, they brought their unique program to a wide array of concert halls, art galleries, experimental venues, and house parties, often commuting from an evening theater show to play an after-hours set. James and Andie continue to perform and commission new works, collaborating with an eclectic community of composers, actors, writers, and visual artists. www.jamesandie.com

Robert Ashley (1930–2014) is particularly known for his work in new forms of opera. In Ann Arbor in the 1960s, Ashley organized the ONCE Festival and directed the legendary ONCE Group, with whom he developed his first operas. Throughout the 1970s, he directed the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College and toured with the Sonic Arts Union. He produced and directed *Music with Roots in the Aether*, a 14-hour television opera/documentary about the work and ideas of seven American composers. His opera for television, *Perfect Lives*, is widely considered the precursor of “music-television.” Stage versions of *Perfect Lives*, *Atalanta (Acts of God)*, *Improvement (Don Leaves Linda)*, *Foreign Experiences*, *eL/Aficionado*, and *Now Eleanor’s Idea* toured throughout the U.S. and Canada, Europe, and Asia during the 1980s and ’90s. *Dust*, followed by *Celestial Excursions* and *The Old Man Lives in Concrete*, toured from 1999–2012. His last opera, *Crash*, was completed in December 2013. www.robertashley.org

Brooklyn composer **Lainie Fefferman’s** (b. 1982) most recent commissions have been from ETHEL, Kathleen Supové, TILT Brass, James Moore, Eleonore Oppenheim, JACK Quartet, and Dither. Her recent evening-length piece *Here I Am* for Newspeak and Va Vocals, the culmination of her residency at Roulette through the Jerome Foundation for the 2013–14 season, was warmly received by a sold-out audience. Starting in April 2015, she began her time at HERE Arts Center as a resident fellow, where she will create a multimedia opera based on ancient mathematical texts for sopranos Mellissa Hughes, Caroline Shaw, and Martha Cluver, with Mantra Percussion and lighting designer Eric Southern. Fefferman is the founder and co-director of Exapno, a New Music Community Center in downtown Brooklyn, a lead organizer of the New Music Bake Sale, and is co-founder of the New Music Gathering, a national new-music event. She received her doctorate in composition from Princeton and continues to be a performing member of the Princeton-based laptop ensemble Sideband. www.lainiefefferman.com

Paula Matthusen (b. 1978) is a composer who writes both electroacoustic and acoustic music and realizes sound installations. Her work often considers discrepancies in musical space—real, imagined, and remembered. Her music has been performed by Dither Electric Guitar Quartet, Mantra Percussion, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, orchest de ereprijs, the Estonian National Ballet, The Glass Farm Ensemble, James Moore, Wil Smith, Terri Hron, Kathryn Woodard, Todd Reynolds, Kathleen Supové, Margaret Lancaster, Dana Jessen, and Jody Redhage. Awards include the Walter Hinrichsen Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Fulbright Grant, two ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers’ Awards, the MacCracken and Langley Ryan Fellowship, and the 2014–2015 Elliott Carter Rome Prize. Matthusen is currently Assistant Professor of Music at Wesleyan University. www.paulamatthusen.com

James Moore (b. 1979) is a guitarist, multi-instrumentalist and composer. He is a founding member of the electric guitar quartet Dither, and performs internationally as a soloist and ensemble player. In addition to pieces for his duo with Andie Springer, Moore's compositional output includes a body of work for his acoustic quartet The Hands Free as well as compositions for Dither, the violin duo String Noise, pianist Kathleen Supové, bassist James Ilgrefritz, and the Anagram Ensemble. His music has been featured at the Kitchen's LAB series and the Tribeca New Music Festival. www.jamesmooreguitar.com

Larry Polansky (b. 1954) is a composer, theorist, teacher, writer, performer, programmer, editor, and publisher. He lives in Santa Cruz, California, teaching at UC Santa Cruz. He is also the Emeritus Strauss Professor of Music at Dartmouth College, and co-director and co-founder of Frog Peak Music. www.larrypolansky.com

Ken Thomson (b. 1976) is a Brooklyn-based composer, clarinetist and saxophonist. In demand as a composer and freelancer in many settings, he moves quickly between genres and scenes, bringing a fiery intensity and emotional commitment to every musical situation. He has recently released a CD of his compositions for the heralded JACK Quartet, entitled *Thaw*, on Cantaloupe Music. His latest project as a composer-performer, called Slow/Fast, was created to meld jazz and contemporary music with a personal bent; the group has released two CDs internationally. He plays clarinet for the Bang on a Can All-Stars. He plays saxophone and is one of the four composers in the punk/jazz band Gutbucket, with whom he has toured internationally to nineteen countries and thirty-two states over sixteen years. He has been commissioned by the American Composers Orchestra, Bang on a Can, and others, and has received awards from New Music USA, ASCAP, and Meet the Composer. www.ktonline.net

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Robert Ashley

Atalanta (Acts of God). Lovely Music LCD 3301. (2 CDs)

Automatic Writing. Lovely Music LCD 1002.

el/Aficionado. Lovely Music LCD 1004.

Music From the ONCE Festival 1961–1966. New World Records 80567. (5 CDs)

Perfect Lives. Lovely Music LCD 4917. (3 CDs)

Lainie Fefferman

Tongue of Thorns. Included on *Dither*. Henceforth Records HNF 108.

Paula Matthusen

of minutiae and memory. New Amsterdam Records 31.

Larry Polansky

Lonesome Road. New World Records 80566.

The Theory of Impossible Melody. New World Records 80684.

The World's Longest Melody. New World Records 80700.

Ken Thomson

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This recording is dedicated to Robert Ashley.

~ James & Andie

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JAMES MOORE & ANDIE SPRINGER

GERTRUDES

MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND RESONATOR GUITAR BY ROBERT ASHLEY, LAINIE FEFFERMAN, PAULA MATTHUSEN, JAMES MOORE, LARRY POLANSKY, AND KEN THOMSON

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James Moore, resonator guitar, voice
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