

THE COMPLETE SONGS OF VIRGIL THOMSON FOR VOICE AND PIANO  
 FLORESTAN RECITAL PROJECT  
 AARON ENGBRETH, ALISON D'AMATO, ARTISTIC CO-DIRECTORS

SARAH PELLETIER, SOPRANO; LYNNE MCMURTRY, CONTRALTO; WILLIAM HITE, TENOR; AARON ENGBRETH, BARITONE; ALISON D'AMATO, PIANIST; LINDA OSBORN, PIANIST; JOHN McDONALD, PERCUSSIONIST

**Disc 1 [TT: 71:20]**

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|---|------|--------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Vernal Equinox</i> (1920, unpublished)                                      | 1:49 | Sarah Pelletier, Linda Osborn  |
| 2. <i>Ah, Sunflower!</i> (1920, unpublished)                                      | 1:18 | William Hite, Linda Osborn     |
| 3. <i>Susie Asado</i> (1926)  | 1:42 | Aaron Engebret, Alison d'Amato |
| 4. <i>Preciosilla</i> (1927)  | 4:05 | Sarah Pelletier, Linda Osborn  |
| <i>Five Songs from William Blake</i> (1951)                                       |      |                                |
| 5. (I) <i>The Divine Image</i>  | 2:33 | Aaron Engebret, Alison d'Amato |
| 6. (II) <i>The Tiger</i>  | 2:53 |                                |
| 7. (III) <i>The Land of Dreams</i>  | 3:05 |                                |
| 8. (IV) <i>The Little Black Boy</i>   | 4:01 |                                |
| 9. (V) <i>And Did Those Feet</i>  | 3:01 |                                |
| 10. <i>Portrait of F.B. (Frances Blood)</i> (1929)                                | 5:58 | Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato |
| 11. <i>La Valse Grégorienne</i> (1927)  | 2:09 | William Hite, Linda Osborn     |
| 12. <i>Film: Deux soeurs qui ne sont pas soeurs</i> (1930)                        | 5:01 | William Hite, Linda Osborn     |
| 13. <i>The Tiger</i> (1926)   | 1:50 | Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato |
| 14. <i>Le Berceau de Gertrude Stein ou Le Mystère de la rue de Fleurus</i> (1928) | 3:20 | William Hite, Linda Osborn     |
| 15. <i>Les Soirées bagnolaises</i> (1928, unpublished)                            | 7:07 | Sarah Pelletier, Linda Osborn  |
| <i>La Belle en dormant</i> (1931)   |      |                                |
| 16. (I) <i>Pour chercher sur la carte des mers</i>                                | 1:12 | William Hite, Linda Osborn     |
| 17. (II) <i>La première de toutes</i>   | 1:21 |                                |
| 18. (III) <i>Mon amour est bon à dire</i>   | 1:23 |                                |
| 19. (IV) <i>Partis les vaisseaux</i>  | :53  |                                |
| <i>Trois Poèmes de la Duchesse de Rohan</i> (1928, #1 unpublished)                |      |                                |
| 20. (I) <i>À Son Altesse La Princesse Antoinette Murat</i>                        | 1:52 | Sarah Pelletier, Linda Osborn  |
| 21. (II) <i>La Seine</i>  | 2:35 | Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato |
| 22. (III) <i>Jour de chaleur aux bains de mer</i>                                 | 1:25 | Sarah Pelletier, Linda Osborn  |
| 23. <i>Air de Phèdre</i> (1930)   | 6:09 | Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato |
| 24. <i>Commentaire sur Saint Jérôme</i> (1928, unpublished)                       | 1:05 | Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato |
| 25. <i>Le Singe et le Léopard</i> (1930)  | 3:33 | Aaron Engebret, Alison d'Amato |

**Disc 2 [TT: 76:04]**

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|---|-------|----------------------------------|
| 1. <i>At the Spring</i> (1955)  | 1:32  | Aaron Engebretth, Alison d'Amato |
| 2. <i>Dirge</i> (1939)  | 1:25  | Aaron Engebretth, Alison d'Amato |
| <i>Shakespeare Songs</i> (1957)   |       | William Hite, Linda Osborn       |
| 3. (I) Was This Fair Face the Cause?  | 2:19  |                                  |
| 4. (II) Take, O, Take Those Lips Away   | 2:14  |                                  |
| 5. (III) Tell Me Where Is Fancy Bred  | 1:27  |                                  |
| 6. (IV) Pardon, Goddess of the Night  | 1:59  |                                  |
| 7. (V) Sigh No More, Ladies   | 2:34  |                                  |
| 8. <i>Consider, Lord</i> (1955)   | 1:35  | Aaron Engebretth, Alison d'Amato |
| 9. <i>The Bell Doth Toll</i> (1955)   | 1:39  | Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato   |
| 10. <i>Remember Adam's Fall</i> (1955)  | 2:45  | Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato   |
| 11. <i>John Peel</i> (1955)   | 3:21  | Aaron Engebretth, Alison d'Amato |
| 12. <i>Look, How the Floor of Heaven</i> (1955)   | 1:33  | William Hite, Linda Osborn       |
| 13. <i>If Thou a Reason Dost Desire to Know</i> (1955-58)   | 2:47  | Aaron Engebretth, Alison d'Amato |
| <i>Praises and Prayers</i> (1963)   |       | Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato   |
| 14. (I) From the Canticle of the Sun  | 5:19  |                                  |
| 15. (II) My Master Hath a Garden  | 1:32  |                                  |
| 16. (III) Sung by the Shepherds   | 4:05  |                                  |
| 17. (IV) Before Sleeping  | 2:32  |                                  |
| 18. (V) Jerusalem, My Happy Home  | 3:25  |                                  |
| <i>Three Sentences of Solomon</i> (1924, unpublished)   |       | Sarah Pelletier, Linda Osborn    |
| 19. (I) Thou that Dwellest in the Gardens   | 1:18  |                                  |
| 20. (II) Return, O Shulamite!   | 1:38  |                                  |
| 21. (III) I Am My Beloved's   | 1:00  |                                  |
| <i>Five Phrases from the Song of Solomon</i> (1926)   |       | Sarah Pelletier, John McDonald   |
| 22. (I) Thou That Dwellest in the Gardens   | :53   |                                  |
| 23. (II) Return, O Shulamite!   | 1:16  |                                  |
| 24. (III) O, My Dove  | 1:05  |                                  |
| 25. (IV) I Am My Beloved's  | 1:14  |                                  |
| 26. (V) By Night  | 1:21  |                                  |
| 27. <i>Oraison funèbre de Henriette-Marie de France, Reine de la Grande-Bretagne</i> (1930/34, unpublished) | 12:17 | William Hite, Linda Osborn       |
| <i>Mass for Solo Voice</i> (1960)   |       | Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato   |
| 28. (I) Kyrie Eleison   | 2:19  |                                  |
| 29. (II) Gloria In Excelsis   | 3:35  |                                  |
| 30. (III) Sanctus   | 1:05  |                                  |
| 31. (IV) Benedictus Qui Venit   | :40   |                                  |
| 32. (V) Agnus Dei   | 2:19  |                                  |

### Disc 3 [TT: 50:57]

1. *My Shepherd Will Supply My Need* (1937/59) 4:17  
Sarah Pelletier, William Hite, Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato
  
- Two By Marianne Moore* (1963) Sarah Pelletier, Linda Osborn
2. (I) English Usage or "Strike till the iron is hot" 2:29
3. (II) My Crow Pluto or "Even when the bird is walking we know that it has wings" 2:13
  
4. *Go to Sleep, Gabriel Liebowitz* (1939, unpublished) :55 Lynne McMurtry
5. *The Courtship of the Yongly-Bongly-Bo* (1973) 6:35 Aaron Engebret, Alison d'Amato
6. *Chamber Music* (1931, unpublished) 2:17 William Hite, Linda Osborn
7. *A Lullaby for Margaret Wheeler* (1987, unpublished) 1:16 Sarah Pelletier
8. *From Sneden's Landing Variations* (1972) 2:04 Lynne McMurtry, Alison d'Amato
9. *What Is It?* (1979) 2:31 Aaron Engebret, Alison d'Amato
10. *Go to Sleep, Pare McTaggett Lorentz: A Lullaby* (1935, unpublished) :42 Sarah Pelletier
11. *The Cat* (1980) 3:13 Sarah Pelletier, Aaron Engebret, Linda Osborn
  
- Tres Estampas de Niñez* (1957) Sarah Pelletier, Linda Osborn
12. (I) Todas las Horas 2:21
13. (II) Son Amigos de Todos :55
14. (III) Nadie lo Oye como Ellos 3:38
  
15. *Go to Sleep, Alexander Smallens, Jr.* (1937, unpublished) 1:11 Aaron Engebret
  
- Mostly About Love* (1959) William Hite, Linda Osborn
16. (I) Love Song 2:25
17. (II) Down at the Docks 2:08
18. (III) Let's Take a Walk 1:24
19. (IV) A Prayer to Saint Catherine 2:52
  
20. *Collected Poems* (1959) 5:31 Sarah Pelletier, Aaron Engebret, Alison d'Amato

The Florestan Recital Project was originally created to celebrate the depth and richness of art song. In the twentieth century, there is no finer example of these qualities than the songs of Virgil Thomson. While crafting this recording, we have lived alongside Thomson and have come to know him through these remarkable songs, many of which are recorded here for the first time. Each one is a world unto itself, a treasure waiting to be explored. As his interpreters, preparing this catalogue of songs has been an inspirational journey through his witty wordplay, unique compositional language, and deep personal expression. We are delighted to invite you on that same journey as you explore this musical compendium of one of our greatest American voices. For us, it has been a labor of love.

—Aaron Engebretth & Alison d’Amato, Artistic Co-Directors

This recording is the first complete recorded catalog of Virgil Thomson songs that were originally composed for voice and piano. In addition to his known songs, the discs include unpublished songs that were obtained from The Virgil Thomson Papers at Yale University Library’s Special Collections. Additionally, we’ve included Thomson’s parallel version of the *Song of Solomon* settings for voice and percussion, as well as four of his many touching lullabies dedicated to close friends on the occasion of their children’s births.

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“The way to write American music is simple. All you have to do is be an American and then write any kind of music you wish.” —Virgil Thomson

“To anybody brought up there, as I was, ‘Kansas City’ always meant the Missouri one,” is the way Virgil Thomson began his *Autobiography*. Kansas City was at the center of his identity, and he said that the purpose of his music was to tell Paris, the other central location of his life, about Kansas City. Thomson was born in 1896 in Kansas City and grew up there, only leaving to go into the army in the First World War. He wrote that he was driven “by a desire to get into the fighting.” Despite considerable effort on his part to get to the war, he never left the United States during his army service, spending most of his time stationed in Oklahoma, Texas, New York, and Louisiana. After being discharged from the army, he became a student at Harvard University. Thomson came to composition relatively late, at age 24, when he was a student at Harvard. (“The reason is that, though I was already a trained pianist, organist and choirmaster with a long professional experience, my training in composition was almost non-existent when I went to Harvard. Kansas City had had little to offer in that branch.”) His first works were songs, settings of Amy Lowell (*Vernal Equinox*) and Blake (*The Sunflower*), which were followed by pieces for piano and choral works. Early on in his time at the university Thomson became a member of the Harvard Glee Club, from whose ranks, rather than the army’s, he saw Paris for the first time, during the group’s 1921 European tour. France enchanted Thomson, who wrote of that first trip: “And as I climbed, stepping around tiny women in black beating small laden asses with large sticks and exhorting them with cries, I found myself, though just from England, saying, ‘Thank God to be back where they speak my language.’” A traveling fellowship from Harvard enabled him to stay on the next year in Paris, studying with Nadia Boulanger, before returning to Harvard to complete his degree. After his final year at Harvard, a year in New York studying conducting with the American Orchestra Association and counterpoint with Rosario Scalero, and another year in Boston (during the first of these years in Boston he was organist-choirmaster of King’s Chapel), he finally returned to Paris, intending to make it his home and the locus of his professional activity, and devoted himself to writing music.

While Thomson was at Harvard he had become acquainted with the work of Erik Satie and of Gertrude Stein (Thomson said that he always carried around with him a thin volume of hers, *Tender Buttons*, to amuse “the little friends”), both of whom were major figures in his life. Thomson saw Satie at a distance during his first year in Paris, but he did not attempt an acquaintance (“. . . wishing to get inside his music first, then make my homage later through performance. That way we might find something real to talk about, and a conversation so begun might extend to my own work.”). By the time he returned, having given the first American performance of Satie’s *Socrate*, Satie had died, so they never actually met. After his return to Paris, he “often loafed” at Shakespeare and Company, the celebrated English-language bookstore run by Sylvia Beach, the first publisher of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, hoping to meet Stein when she came there. Although he made a number of interesting acquaintances there, including Joyce himself, he didn’t meet Stein. That introduction came almost by accident: In the winter of 1925 Stein had heard that Thomson’s friend George Antheil was “that year’s genius” and, in order to “look him over,” invited him to call. Antheil took Thomson along, for “intellectual protection.” Stein and her companion Alice Toklas did not find Antheil to be of interest, but she and Thomson, as he said, “got on like Harvard men.”

Thomson and Stein embarked on a warm friendship (“As I reread letters from that time,” Thomson wrote, “I am struck by the intensity with which Miss Stein and I took each other up.”), started and maintained by Thomson’s admiration for and promotion of her work. He set some to music (“Poets love being set,” Virgil would say), beginning with *Susie Asado*, written during the

summer following their meeting and delivered to Stein as a present on New Year's Day of 1927. That was soon followed by *Preciosilla*, and then by a number of other works of varying size and scope, both in English and in French. Early on, in February 1927, they began discussing collaborating on an opera.

It was through Stein's texts that Thomson began to address his first and abiding concern, ". . . to break, crack open, and solve for all time anything still waiting to be solved, which was almost everything, about English musical declamation." His approach to this question could be summed up in a phrase from Lewis Carroll: "Take care of the sounds and the sense will take care of itself." As Thomson wrote, ". . . the Stein texts, for prosodizing in this way, were manna. With meanings already abstracted, or absent, or so multiplied that choice among them was impossible, there was no temptation toward tonal illustration, say, of birdie babbling by the brook or heavy heavy hangs my heart. You could make a setting for sound and syntax only, then add, if needed, an accompaniment equally functional. I had no sooner put to music after this recipe one short Stein text than I knew I had opened a door." That intention, to set words as clearly as possible, uninhibited by the need to interpret their meaning with music while adjoining them to a clear, unshakable musical trajectory, was the same for Thomson's songs on Stein's texts as it was for their first opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*. The music which was joined to those words often evoked the hymns, marches, patriotic airs, and parlor songs of Thomson's childhood in Kansas City, but always, as the critic Daniel Albright wrote, is "derived from the scales, triads, and snatches of simple hymns that constitute the racial unconscious of Western Music."

Thomson's settings of Stein's texts, each larger than the last, are a sort of training course for his work on *Four Saints in Three Acts*. John Cage commented on these songs, writing, "In *Susie Asado* he had shared with Gertrude Stein the burden of being 'modern.' With *Preciosilla* he chose to appear outlandishly behind the times because the words he was setting were outlandishly ahead of them." A year after finishing *Four Saints* Thomson set *Portrait of F. B.*, and after that a French text of Stein's, the film scenario *Deux soeurs qui ne sont pas soeurs*, which tells the story of how Stein and Toklas acquired their pet poodle, Basket, and whose accompaniment is a portrait of the dog. After that Thomson set only one other Stein text, the opera *The Mother of Us All*. Stein died soon after completing that libretto and before Thomson had written any of the music for it; he considered Susan B's final speech at the end of the opera to be Stein's epitaph. He never set another text of hers after the opera's completion.

Thomson lived in Paris from 1925 until 1940. During this time his associates were mostly writers and painters rather than musicians, and they were mostly French. These included the visual artists Christian Bérard, Pavel Techelitcheff, Leonid and Eugene Berman, the composer Henri Sauget, and the poet, graphic artist, and publisher George Hugnet, who was a particularly close friend and with whom he collaborated on three song works. They considered themselves Neo-Romantics; Thomson wrote, "Our novelty. . . consisted in the use of our personal sentiments as subject matter . . . an immersion complete in what any day might bring . . . *Mystère* was our word, tenderness our way, unreasoning compassion our aim." Over this time he wrote a number of vocal compositions setting texts in French, in which Thomson mostly adhered to the same procedures he had applied to English settings. But, possibly because many of these French texts do not have the intense abstraction of Stein, they have a wider range of expressive character, ranging from the waltzes of *La Valse Grégorienne* through the proclamatory *Commentaire sur Saint Jérôme* to the grandly expressive and beautiful *Oraison Funèbre*, a funeral sermon of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (which, without sounding like it at all, evokes Satie's *Socrate*). This solo cantata

written in 1930 was Thomson's response to the death of his friend the painter Emmanuel Faÿ, who died alone in a hotel room in New York at a very early age, an event that haunted Thomson for years. He described "its declamatory melodies and high-arched Baroque curves, some of them pages long and all built to match Bossuet's long, florid, loose-hung, and as often as not quite illogical Baroque sentences." It is undoubtedly one of the major works of that period of Thomson's career, but has rarely been performed, since it was never published.

The beginning of the Second World War made it necessary for Thomson, who by that time had lived in Paris for close to fifteen years, to relocate to the United States, leaving all of his belongings except for his clothes and his music manuscripts. When he arrived in New York in August of 1940, he was almost immediately offered the job of chief music critic of the *New York Herald Tribune*, a post he held for fourteen years, becoming the most respected and powerful music critic in New York. During most of the war, Thomson's new job apparently took most of his attention. He wrote very little music, and none for voice. However, in June of 1945, Thomson received an offer of a commission for a second opera. Thomson was eager to write another, and with the war drawing to a close, he conveyed the news to Stein, who was delighted to accept the offer. The result of this collaboration, *The Mother of Us All*, was first produced in May of 1947; although it did not have the same wide recognition of *Four Saints*, it was, nonetheless, a success. The experience of writing the opera, and possibly the end of the war, seems to have unleashed for Thomson a sort of tidal wave of music over the next few years, all of it accomplished while he was still doing his newspaper work, including the *Three Pictures for Orchestra*, *A Solemn Music*, the *Cello Concerto*, Piano Etudes, the music for the films *Tuesday in November* and *Louisiana Story*, and the *Five Songs from William Blake*. All of these works, starting with sections of *The Mother of Us All*, introduce into Thomson's language a new and very much expanded use of chromaticism, probably in reaction to the rise of twelve-tone music and as a result of his post-war friendship with Pierre Boulez. (Thomson met the twenty-one-year-old Boulez on his 1946 trip to Paris; he was certainly the first musical journalist in the United States to write about Boulez and his music, which he admired, finding it "like an only slightly out-of-tune Ravel."). Thomson deployed this chromatically enriched language in the *Five Songs from William Blake* in realizing his long-held desire to convey in music a portrait of Blake's philosophy. Because of the close integration of this expanded chromaticism into his personal language, it may be unnoticed on a cursory listening, but it reveals the complexity of the text-music relationship in the Blake songs, most especially in *The Land of Dreams*, *The Little Black Boy*, and in the particularly sonorous quality of *And Did Those Feet*. Blake's poem *The Tiger* obviously fascinated Thomson, who had first set it in 1926 as well as including it in the later Blake set.

In the two years after his leaving his post at the *Herald Tribune* in 1954, Thomson worked with his friend John Houseman (who had directed the first production of *Four Saints in Three Acts*) at the Stratford Connecticut Shakespeare Festival, including a production of *Much Ado About Nothing* with Katherine Hepburn and Alfred Drake set among Spanish residents in Southern California in the nineteenth century. The *Shakespeare Songs* were drawn from Thomson's work from this period. When Thomson found that his simple a cappella choral arrangement of *My Shepherd Will Supply My Need* was his best-selling piece he produced a more elaborate, idiosyncratic, and very beautiful version for voice and piano. The production of the *Old English Songs* may also have been due to commercial incentives. The list of works in the 1959 book about Thomson and his music by Kathleen Hoover and John Cage, who had considerable direct input, at least of information, from its subject, lists a set of *Four Old English Songs* for baritone, and a set of *Three Old English Songs*

for soprano. Other sources list other groupings involving the same songs. In his discussion of them Cage considers them all to be in one group, as does the catalog of Thomson's works in the Yale Library, which has his manuscripts. However they are arranged, all have the same directness, freshness, and appeal that characterize the *Shakespeare Songs*. From time to time, starting when Thomson's friend Alexander Smallens (who had conducted the first performance of *Four Saints*) had a son in 1935, Thomson wrote short unaccompanied lullabies for the newborn children of certain friends. All four of the "Go To Sleep"s on these discs are unpublished and are here recorded for the first time.

A revival of *Four Saints in Three Acts* was presented in New York and Paris in 1952, and it featured a number of young singers just out of school, including Leontyne Price and Betty Allen. Allen and Thomson became close friends, and in 1962 Allen, through the Ford Foundation, commissioned Thomson to write a song cycle for her to premiere at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Thomson at first suggested love poems of D. H. Lawrence, which Allen, who was a very proper lady, considered indecent, distasteful, and even shocking. Finally they agreed that Thomson would set for her a series of religious poems, which he called *Praises and Prayers*. Tailored to Allen's powerful, wide-ranging voice of many colors, the cycle consists of three large, grand, bravura arias, interspersed with two more intimate, and, especially in the case of *Before Sleeping*, touching songs. He later also wrote for Allen, keeping with her preference for his religious music, a setting of the ordinary of the Mass for solo voice and piano.

Very soon after finishing *The Mother of Us All* Thomson was eager to write another opera. With Stein dead and no longer available for active collaboration, he spent a great deal of time and energy trying to locate a librettist. Kenneth Koch, who he met in the mid-1950s, was for a while a strong candidate. He and Thomson had a number of common friends among the young up-and-coming band of New York poets, painters, and musicians, including Larry Rivers, Frank O'Hara, and Ned Rorem. Thomson admired Koch's poetry which he proclaimed was "like Gertrude, except it makes sense"; Koch had also had been successful in theater. Eventually he embarked on writing a libretto with Thomson's participation and encouragement. It seems that Thomson, as he had done with Stein's texts, embarked on a sort of training program of setting poems by Koch in preparation for work on an opera. This resulted in the song cycle *Mostly About Love*, which he wrote on commission from Alice Esty, a soprano who seems to have had rather limited abilities, who was the wife of an advertising executive, and had considerable means. Esty sang regularly, mostly in recitals which she produced, and she regularly commissioned works from contemporary composers whose music interested her. In addition to Thomson, she commissioned works from Marc Blitzstein, Paul Bowles, Darius Milhaud, Henri Sauget, Lennox Berkeley, Francis Poulenc, and others. She also commissioned Thomson's *Two* by *Marianne Moore*.

Thomson also set, as a duet, a poem of Koch's called *Collected Poems* which reminded him of Stein's *Tender Buttons*; a list of titles followed by one-line poems in which the baritone sings the titles and the soprano sings the poems. In the end Thomson rejected Koch's libretto. The collaborator who Thomson finally found was Jack Larson, an actor (best known for playing Jimmy Olsen in the Superman television series), movie producer, and writer of plays in verse. They wrote Thomson's last opera and his largest work, *Lord Byron*, which was commissioned by the Ford Foundation for the Metropolitan Opera (which did not in the end produce it). Thomson's final voice-piano work is *The Cat*, a duet on a poem of Larson's, written after *Lord Byron*. Another late song, a satellite of the late choral work *Cantata on Poems of Edward Lear*, is a setting on Lear's *The Courtship of the Yongly Bongly Bo* from 1973.

Thomson wrote that the great song composers—Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wolf, Mahler, Fauré, Debussy, Duparc, Ravel, and Poulenc—accomplished their miracles through their ability to make the music “not only of equal quality with . . . the verse . . . but also its mate. It gets inside a poem and stays there, intertwined unforgettably, never to be thought of henceforth as not a part of the whole idea.” He contrasted these works with the songs of Purcell, which he thought, although very beautiful and expertly done, did not fuse the music and text; the music was merely “decorative.” Thomson’s songs, which are an important chronicle both of his career and of American music, run the gamut of his classification. If one attempts to set words to music in a way that deliberately avoids interpreting or illustrating them, one probably creates a situation where the music and words are separable. So the early Stein settings, the *Shakespeare Songs*, and the *Old English Songs* may (or may not) be very beautifully and elegantly decorative, but this listener finds it impossible to think of the music of *Mostly About Love, Praises and Prayers*, or the *Five Songs from William Blake* as anything other than an inseparable part of the whole. There the music gets right inside of the words, and right inside of us.

—Rodney Lister

*Composer and pianist Rodney Lister studied composition with Virgil Thomson and was, before and after that, a friend and admirer. He is on the faculties of The Boston University School of Music, the Preparatory School of The New England Conservatory, and Greenwood Music Camp, and has written articles and reviews for Tempo and Sequenza21.*

**Florestan Recital Project** (Aaron Engebret and Alison d'Amato, Artistic Co-Directors) takes its name from the fiery character of Florestan, one of the creative alter egos of composer Robert Schumann, who wrote of a basic artistic mission: "to be remindful of older times and their works and to emphasize that only from such a pure source can new artistic beauties be fostered." This message is at the center of our activities; generating projects that draw connections between art song of the past, present, and future while exploring the genre's rich collaborative possibilities. Since its inception in 2001, Florestan Recital Project has grown into a national art song powerhouse, engaging audiences and artists in art song performance, innovation, recording, and mentorship.

Florestan's artistic activities are comprised of recitals, recordings, song festivals, residencies, and premieres. We regularly collaborate with innovative arts organizations from museums to ballet companies. Our recording activity commenced in 2008 with the creation of Florestan Records, which has grown into a varied and critically-acclaimed catalog of existing and world-premiere art song recordings, affirming our conviction that the gift of live performance gains value the more music is shared.

Please visit us online, at [www.florestanproject.org](http://www.florestanproject.org).

Pianist **Alison d'Amato** is a dynamic and versatile musician, committed to performing and teaching in the full spectrum of collaborative musical genres. She is Artistic Co-Director of Florestan Recital Project, and Founding Faculty of the Vancouver International Song Institute. Since 2011, she has been Program Co-Director of Art Song Lab, which presents new works in collaboration with composers, poets, and audiences. Dr. d'Amato is Assistant Professor of Vocal Coaching at Eastman School of Music and Lecturer in Voice in University of Buffalo's Department of Theater and Dance. In all these activities, she is dedicated to energizing the relationships and communication inherent in music.

Baritone **Aaron Engebret** has been featured in performances from Sapporo's Kitara Hall and Boston's Symphony Hall, to the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris and Washington's Kennedy Center and made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2014. He appears regularly at leading festivals and with orchestras in the U.S. and abroad. As a recording artist, he is featured on more than twenty releases, including two with Boston Early Music Festival and Radio Bremen, both nominated for Grammy Awards for Best Operatic Recording. While on the music faculty of Tufts University, he was twice awarded faculty development grants to study music of the French Baroque in Paris.

Tenor **William Hite** began his career in Boston singing early music with the Boston Camerata, Ensemble Sequentia and the music of Bach, Handel, Schubert, and Schumann with the renowned Emmanuel Music under the mentorship and direction of Craig Smith. He has since developed an outstanding reputation as a singer who brings a keen imagination, deep musical connections, and a vivid color palette to all his performances. He has performed with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Handel and Haydn Society, and Boston Baroque. He is a senior member of the voice faculty at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Contralto **Lynne McMurtry** brings her rich, powerful voice and keen musical intelligence to a diverse wealth of repertoire. She is known for her great facility in opera roles such as Dame Quickly in Verdi's *Falstaff* and Arsace in Rossini's *Semiramide*, and for her compelling

performances of chamber repertoire. She is an avid and generous recitalist, and her fresh and dramatic approach to programming has garnered many accolades. She is a Lecturer in Voice at the State University of New York at Fredonia.

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

Pianist **Linda Osborn** has performed as a vocal accompanist, chamber, and orchestral musician in a wide variety of venues in the United States and abroad. Her performance highlights include recital appearances at St. John's College in Cambridge, England, the Grand Place Ath and the Stadsschouwburg Brugges in Belgium, the University of Hawaii at Hilo, and music festivals in both Santiago de Compostela and Lugo, Spain. She lives in Boston, where she is principal pianist of the Boston Modern Orchestra Project and Artistic Administrator/Company Pianist for Odyssey Opera of Boston.

Soprano **Sarah Pelletier** has appeared at Spoleto Festival USA, Bard Music Festival, and Aldeburgh Festival in the UK. Highlights include appearances with New England Symphonic Ensemble at Carnegie Hall; a solo recital on Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage; Grieg's *Peer Gynt* at Brevard Festival; Britten's *War Requiem* and Berg's *Wozzeck* with New England Philharmonic; Bach's *B minor Mass* with the San Francisco Bach Choir; Handel's *Messiah* with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra; Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* with Boston Modern Orchestra Project; Schumann's *Genoveva* and Handel's *Ariodante* with Emmanuel Music; and Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* with Princeton Festival Opera. Pelletier toured Japan, China, and Italy with Maestro Seiji Ozawa, performing at the Saito Kinen Festival and Maggio Musicale Fiorentino.

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