

**american composers orchestra**  
world premiere recording



**Kati Agócs • Michael Gatonska • Fang Man  
Clint Needham • Gregory Spears**

**Emerging Composers Series: Vol. 1**



## EMERGING COMPOSERS SERIES

This album, the first digital download in American Composers Orchestra's Emerging Composer Series, features world premiere recordings of music by five up-and-coming composers. The works were all performed as part of Orchestra Underground, ACO's cutting-edge, flexible and entrepreneurial orchestral series at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall, and later recorded. Each of the composers has been a participant in ACO's career-building emerging composer programs, and each brings a unique vision and voice to new orchestral music

Creating opportunities for emerging composers is central to the mission of American Composers Orchestra. All too often it is the case that up-and-coming composers are excluded from professional orchestra programs, as better-known music is programmed. Yet, writing for orchestra remains one of the supreme challenges and rewards for most composers. The instrumental possibilities, the timbral nuances, the dynamic range, and the raw energy of dozens of talented instrumentalists unified in their musical execution is still, even in the 21st century, a singular and powerful sound experience. It is what has drawn these fine young composers to the orchestra, and it is the opportunity to see and hear what these composers might do with these possibilities that has drawn ACO to them.

For over 20 consecutive years the orchestra has offered New Music Readings (first as the Whitaker New Music Readings and subsequently as the Underwood Readings) that have become one of this country's most coveted opportunities for emerging composers. Readings give emerging composers the opportunity to work with an orchestra singular in its commitment to

the development of the American composer, and to hear their work performed by some of the country's most outstanding contemporary music instrumentalists. Composers also benefit from critical feedback and mentoring from conductor, players, and senior composers. ACO has brought its New Music Readings to composers around the country through touring and residency programs, and its national network, EarShot, that assists and advises other orchestras in mounting their own Readings. And ACO commissions a lot of new music, well over 200 works to date, much of it from young composers - often their very first professional commission. (Four of the five works on this album are ACO commissions.)

Gregory Spears's *Finishing* was first developed as part of ACO's Readings and Lab at University of Pennsylvania in 2007 - a sublime work that uses dog whistles (yes, you can hear them) and tape recorders within the orchestra. Kati Agócs deftly strings together a series of exquisite intimate sonorities in her ACO-commissioned *Pearls*. Clint Needham's Chamber Symphony explores themes of personal and universal transformation; the composition the result of Clint's winning ACO's prestigious Underwood commission. Fang Man, also an alumna of the Underwood program, combines clarinet soloist and electronic techniques with melodies from Chinese opera in *Resurrection*. Michael Gatonska, another Underwood commissionee, uses the ever-shifting configurations of birds in flight as the organizing principle behind his *After the Wings of Migratory Birds*, creating music that migrates through space with dynamic energy.

More information about American Composers Orchestra can be found at [www.americancomposers.org](http://www.americancomposers.org).



Credit: Olga Khopshanosova | Dreamstime.com

### Kati Agócs: Pearls

*Pearls* makes use of the exquisite (jeweled) sonorities possible in the chamber orchestra with single winds and brass. It is a diminutive piece, meant to be intimate, almost like an orchestral "blog." The title comes from a passage in the Gospel of Matthew (13:45-46):

Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hidden in a field, the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

At the time of origin for the Gospel of Matthew passage, pearls were the most valuable attainable thing. For me,

pearls can also represent tears.

Composer Kati Agócs was born 1975 in Windsor, Canada, of Hungarian and American background, and has been on the composition faculty of the New England Conservatory in Boston since 2008.

Kati Agócs earned the Doctor of Musical Arts and Masters degrees from The Juilliard School. She is also an alumna of the Aspen Music School, Lester B. Pearson College of the Pacific, and Sarah Lawrence College. Awards include an inaugural 2009 Brother Thomas Fellowship from the Boston Foundation, a 2008 Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, ASCAP Leonard Bernstein Fellowship at the Tanglewood Music Center, grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, a Fulbright Fellowship, a New York Foundation for the Arts Composition fellowship, a Jerome Foundation commission, Presser Foundation Award, and honors from ASCAP in their Morton Gould Young Composer Awards.

### Michael Gatonska: After the Wings of Migratory Birds

As the musical contents (linear, harmonic, etc.) of this work begin to gradually present themselves, some of these initial sources unfold and later re-appear in multiple combinations and formations. These musical sources individually act as a constructed dimension or “stream,” and one stream may extend over two or three other individually constructed streams before either exhausting itself and disappearing, or transforming itself into a new dynamic activity that pushes (or retracts) the forward flow of the music.

This approach is adopted in order to create a continuum

of sonic refreshment and movement; a seamless formal musical web or design that is created through constant variance, juxtapositions, always-evolving stratifications and orchestral colorings, and an overall circulation of sound forms, energies, and dynamic elasticity from beginning to end. Rather than a fixed or compartmentalized formal structure, the attempt is to compose a music that migrates through space and is created by its inherent dynamic energies and activities, resulting in a composition that pushes toward diverse levels of relationships rather than a single or fixed point of view.



Credit: Anna Björg

Michael Gatonska studied composition with Krzysztof Penderecki, Marek Stachowski, and Zbigniew Bujarski

at the Academy of Music in Krakow, Poland, as well as with Elias Tanenbaum at Manhattan School of Music. His music has been performed by the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, the Minnesota Orchestra, ACO, Hartford Symphony, Pacific Symphony, Civic Orchestra of Chicago, and he has participated in the Minnesota Orchestra Composer Institute. He has received several awards for his compositions, including fellowship and grant awards from the Civitella Ranieri Center, the Kosciuszko Foundation, ASCAP, the American Music Center, Meet the Composer, and the American Composers Forum. He is a MacDowell Colony Fellow. Gatonska wrote *After the Wings of Migratory Birds* upon winning the 2005 ACO Underwood New Music Readings commissioning prize. The work was also funded in part by the Composer Assistance Program of the American Music Center.

### Fang Man: Resurrection

The title *Resurrection* is adapted from the subtitle of a painting by Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition V - Resurrection*, which became the inspiration for the piece. With the assistance of some computer analysis, I was able to draw closer the relationship of the structure of the painting with the pitch and time structure.

There are two continuous movements. The first primarily utilizes Western techniques, which are concentrated on the dialogue between the clarinet and the orchestra, with an active and mostly dense orchestration; the second part is focused on the clarinet solo accompanied by various sounds that are blended with electronics and the orchestra. The material in the solo clarinet comes from a Peking opera play, *The Battle of Jiu Jiang Kou*.

The play tells a story of ancient China. At the end of

the Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368), leaders of the army corps revolted against the rule of the Yuan Dynasty and competed with each other for dominance. The melodies of the clarinet imitate the conversations between the two main characters in the play, the warlord Chen Youliang (1320–1363) and his marshal, Zhang Dingbian. The latter tries to persuade Chen not to go into battle against the king, Zhu Yuanzhang, as he believes to do so would be to fall into a trap. Chen does not listen to Zhang and leads his troops into the ambush, and is finally defeated. Luckily, his loyal marshal rescues him at the mouth of the Jiu Jiang River. During the work the clarinet plays mainly on glissandos in order to reproduce the distinguished style of “speaking tunes” of the Peking opera.



Credit: Wassily Kandinsky, Composition V, 1911  
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Fang Man is a Chinese-born composer who now lives in the United States. She obtained a Doctorate in Composition from Cornell University, and also a

computer music certificate from the Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics and Music in Paris. Fang Man is currently a Research Assistant Professor at the School of Music of University of South Carolina.

Hailed as “inventive and breathtaking” by The New York Times, Fang Man has been the recipient of numerous grants, awards and commissions. In May 2006 Fang Man participated in ACO’s Underwood New Music Readings, during which her work Black and White was performed, with conductor, George Manahan.

### Clint Needham: Chamber Symphony

I originally envisioned a work inspired by the political scene of the 2008 presidential election, focusing primarily on the hard-fought Democratic Primary race. I decided to have the work’s overall goal focus on the larger idea of transformation—personally as well as universally.

Chamber Symphony is constructed in three movements, which are played without pause and act as the antithesis of each other in terms of texture and mood. The first movement, Hammering Out, employs an aggressive, relentless, pounding beat that frequently shifts and is often emphasized with metallic sounds. The third movement, Radiant Nation, is much lighter and optimistic and uses an upbeat groove throughout. The middle movement, Open-ended Echoes, is the proverbial calm after the storm. Unlike the outer movements, Open-ended Echoes is almost void of any stable beat. The movement attempts to create a peaceful, contemplative mood that transforms the volatile nature of the first movement to the radiant

nature of the last.

The music of Clint Needham has been described as “wildly entertaining” (New York Times), “easy to smile at” (Philadelphia Inquirer), and “well-crafted and arresting... riveting” (Herald Times). Recently named winner of the 2011 International Barlow Prize, Clint’s music has been recognized with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra’s Project 440 Commission, Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, two ASCAP Morton Gould Awards, the William Schuman Prize/BMI Student Composer Award, and the coveted Underwood Commission from ACO.

Clint’s music has been commissioned and performed by the Minnesota Orchestra, Omaha Symphony, ACO, Aspen Concert Orchestra, Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, and New York Youth Symphony, among others. Various chamber groups including Alarm Will Sound, the American Brass Quintet, Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, and New York Classical Players have given performances of his chamber music across the country, as well as in Europe, Japan, and Australia.

Currently Assistant Professor of Music at Ohio Wesleyan University, Clint earned his doctorate degree from Indiana University, where he was a four-year Jacobs School of Music fellow in composition. His principal teachers include Claude Baker, Loris Chobanian, David Dzubay, Michael Gandolfi, Per Mårtensson, Sven-David Sandström, and Richard Wernick. Clint has also studied with Robert Beaser, Syd Hodkinson, Christopher Rouse, and George Tsontakis at the Aspen Music Festival as a Susan and Ford Schumann composition fellow, and with Mario Davidovsky at the Wellesley Composers Conference.



## Gregory Spears: Finishing

Finishing is a meditation on endings. Within the piece the traditional chamber orchestra is augmented with the sound of mark trees, dog whistles, and small tape recorders to produce an ambient haze around a series of recurring trumpet calls. The title also refers to the practice of adding a seductive veneer to the cover of books—in this case depicted musically through shiny textures and an abundance of decorative flourish. I was also interested in the darker melancholic definition of “finish” as that which causes one’s utter downfall or ruin.

Finishing was first workshopped by ACO at its PennPresents Readings and Lab in spring 2007, where it received such a warm reception that ACO later programmed it on its Orchestra Underground series at Zankel Hall in Carnegie Hall.

Gregory Spears writes instrumental and vocal music that blends together stylistic aspects of romanticism, minimalism, and early music. His music has been performed by ACO, Center City Opera Theater, New York Youth Symphony, members of the Los Angeles Opera, the NOW Ensemble, Present Music, So Percussion, and eighth blackbird. His opera Paul’s Case, developed by American Opera Projects, was noted for its “solid dramatic timing, compassionate characterizations, and huge potential” (Philadelphia Inquirer’s Best in Classical Music 2009). Spears also worked with musicologist Simon Morrison to realize the original score for Prokofiev’s ballet Romeo and Juliet, which was premiered by the Mark Morris Dance Group and the Bard Festival.



Credit: Sandra Cunningham | Dreamstime.com

Spears has won prizes from both BMI and ASCAP as well as grants and honors from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, American Composers Forum, and the Fulbright Foundation. Spears teaches a Freshman Writing Seminar at Princeton called Music and Madness, which explores the popularized link between creativity and mental illness. He currently resides in Brooklyn.

## THE ARTISTS

### AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA

American Composers Orchestra (ACO), founded in 1977, is the only orchestra in the world dedicated to the creation, performance, preservation, and promulgation of music by American composers. ACO identifies today’s brightest emerging composers, champions prominent established composers as well as those lesser known, and increases awareness of the infinite variety of American orchestral music, reflecting geographic,

stylistic, and temporal diversity. ACO also serves as an incubator of ideas, research, and talent and as a catalyst for growth and change among orchestras, and advocates for American composers and their music. ACO has performed music by more than 600 American composers, including 200 world premieres and commissioned works. ACO maintains an unparalleled range of activities, including an annual concert series at Carnegie Hall, commissions, recordings, broadcasts and streaming, educational programs, new music reading sessions, composer residencies and fellowships, as well as special projects designed to advance the field.

### GEORGE MANAHAN, CONDUCTOR

Music Director of the American Composers Orchestra since 2010, the wide-ranging and versatile George Manahan has had an esteemed career embracing everything from opera to the concert stage, the traditional to the contemporary. In addition to his work with ACO, Manahan continues his commitment to young musicians as Director of Orchestral Studies at the Manhattan School of Music as well as guest conductor at the Curtis Institute of Music.

Manahan’s guest appearances include the Orchestra of St. Luke’s, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, as well as the symphonies of Atlanta, San Francisco, Hollywood Bowl, and New Jersey, where he served as acting Music Director for four seasons. He is a regular guest with the Music Academy of the West, and the Aspen Music Festival, and has also appeared with the Opera Companies of Seattle, Chicago, Santa Fe, Portland, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Opera National du Paris, Teatro de Comunale de Bologna, the Bergen Festival (Norway), the Casals Festival (Puerto Rico) and Minnesota Opera, where he was Principal Conductor. As Music Director of the Richmond Symphony (VA) for

twelve years and Music Director of the New York City Opera for fourteen seasons, he was honored five times by the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) for his “career-long advocacy for American composers and the music of our time.”

### **JEFFREY MILARSKY, CONDUCTOR**

Jeffrey Milarsky, a leading conductor of contemporary music in New York City, is a frequent collaborator with ACO, having served as both percussionist and assistant conductor with the orchestra. In the US and abroad, he has premiered and recorded works by contemporary composers, including Charles Wuorinen, Fred Lerdahl, Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, Gerard Grisey, Jonathan Dawe, Tristan Murail, Ralph Shapey, Luigi Nono, Mario Davidovsky, and Wolfgang Rihm. Mr. Milarsky is Senior Lecturer in Music at Columbia University, where he is the Music Director and Conductor of the Columbia University Orchestra. He is also on the faculty of The Manhattan School of Music, where he serves as Artistic Director and Conductor of the percussion ensemble, as well as the Music Director of AXIOM, the Juilliard School’s critically acclaimed contemporary music ensemble. In September of 2008 he was named to the conducting faculty of the Juilliard School.

Mr. Milarsky made his debut at the New York City Opera during the 2008-09 season. In the summer of 2008 Mr. Milarsky was called to Tanglewood to substitute for James Levine in an all Elliott Carter program in honor of his 100th birthday. In May 2006, Mr. Milarsky substituted for Mr. Levine at Carnegie Hall, conducting a concert of Milton Babbitt’s chamber music.

### **BRAD LUBMAN, CONDUCTOR**

Brad Lubman, has gained widespread recognition over the past two decades for his versatility, commanding technique, and insightful interpretations. He has worked with a variety of illustrious musical figures including

Pierre Boulez, Oliver Knussen, Steve Reich, and John Zorn.

Lubman’s guest conducting engagements include major orchestras such as the Finnish Radio Symphony, Swedish Radio Symphony, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, ACO, New World Symphony and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Lubman is Music Director of the new music ensemble Signal, founded in 2008 and hailed by The New York Times as “one of the most vital groups of its kind.” Lubman is Associate Professor of Conducting and Ensembles at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, where he has directed the Musica Nova ensemble since joining the faculty in 1997. He is also on the faculty of the Bang-on-a-Can Summer Institute.

### **DEREK BERMEL, CLARINET**

Described as “an eclectic with wide open ears,” ACO’s creative advisor, Derek Bermel, has been widely hailed by colleagues, critics, and audiences across the globe for his creativity and theatricality as a composer of chamber,

symphonic, dance, theater, and pop works, as well as his virtuosity and charisma as a clarinetist, conductor, and jazz and rock musician. Well-versed in the classical and jazz repertoire on clarinet and piano, Mr. Bermel trained with Ben Armato of the Metropolitan Opera and later with Keith Wilson at Yale University. He premiered his own critically acclaimed clarinet concerto, Voices, with American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, and revisited it with several other orchestras worldwide. He has also premiered dozens of new works for clarinet in appearances as soloist throughout the US and Europe.

### **ALEXIS BASKIND, ELECTRONICS**

Baskind is a sound engineer and computer music designer. He first studied sound recording with Fabre au Conservatoire National at Aubervilliers/La-Courneuve Regional Music School. He entered in IRCAM in Paris in 1999, and there he pursued research on room acoustics. Obtaining a Ph.D. in 2003, he has been working since then on music creation, theatre, and dance projects.





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Kati Agócs' piece was commissioned with the support of the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts. Fang Man and Clint Needham's pieces were commissioned with major support from Paul Underwood and additional support by the Jerome Foundation. Michael Gatonska's piece was commissioned with support from Paul Underwood.

## Emerging Composers Series: Vol. 1

### Pearls Kati Agócs

- 1 Chorale I ..... 01:21
- 2 Peregrination ..... 02:51
- 3 Chorale II ..... 02:13
- 4 Peregrination II – Chorale – Postlude ..... 05:39  
 George Manahan, conductor

- 5 **After the Wings of Migratory Birds** Michael Gatonska .. 18:04  
 Brad Lubman, conductor

- 6 **Resurrection** Fang Man ..... 18:39  
 Derek Bermel, clarinet  
 Alexis Baskind and Fang Man, electronics  
 George Manahan, conductor

### Chamber Symphony Clint Needham

- 7 I: Hammering Out ..... 06:05
- 8 II: Open-ended Echoes ..... 08:53
- 9 III: Radiant Nation ..... 06:39  
 Jeffrey Milarsky, conductor

- 10 **Finishing** Gregory Spears ..... 14:01  
 Jeffrey Milarsky, conductor

Man & Agócs recorded live on February 22, 2009. Spears & Needham recorded live on November 16, 2008. Gatonska recorded live on October 15, 2006.

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