

ARCANA

Alex Shapiro



Adam Marks
piano

1. **SPARK** 6:57
2. **SLOWLY, SEARCHING** 6:05
- ARCANA:**
3. 1-Cradle These Roots 3:27
4. 2-Unfurl 2:48
5. 3-Heal from Within 3:00
6. 4-Reach to Light 2:00
7. 5-Branches and Vines 2:10
8. 6-Touch It 1:26
9. 7-Search 4:36
10. 8-From Earth to Sky 3:34

**PIANO SUITE NO. 1:
THE RESONANCE OF
CHILDHOOD:**

11. 1-Variations on a Memory 3:10
12. 2-On My Mother 4:04
13. 3-Quiet Child 1:40
14. 4-For My Father 4:49
15. 5-Older 2:56
16. **INTERMEZZO** 3:39
17. **CHORD HISTORY** 1:57
18. **LUVINA** 4:57

SONATA FOR PIANO:

19. 1-Moderato 6:06
20. 2-Lento-Andante 8:52
21. 3-Scherzo 1:43

—79:58—



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1. SPARK (2011)

Spark was inspired by the life, love, energy, and heart of Dale Mara Bershad, a gifted musician who often used her talents to share the joy of expression and wonder with young children. As a mother, teacher, and performer, Mara's remarkable inner light cast an indelible glow. Her essence remains radiant and present: a spark from a life filled with passion and delight, burning brightly, intensely, and without end.

With fond appreciation to Teresa McCollough, who first brought the spark of these notes to life in November 2011 in concerts in California and New York. A subsequent version of this piece for chamber sextet, using the identical piano part, was recorded by Fifth House Ensemble and appears on their 2014 album titled Excelsior, on Cedille Records.

2. SLOWLY, SEARCHING (2009)


Slowly, searching is a modern-day homage to the lyricism, melancholy, and passion of Robert Schumann. German pianist Susanne Kessel created a project titled *Kreisleriana* 2010, asking eight composers to choose a movement of Schumann's beloved suite as inspiration for their own voice. I was touched by the fourth, *Sehr Langsam*, and chose a few notes from it as my point of departure, and later, development. Two hundred years since this great composer's birth, the themes of peacefulness, joy, madness, and deep pain remain a human constant.

With warmest thanks to Susanne Kessel, who premiered and recorded this piece for her beautiful album on the Obst Music label, An Robert Schumann.

3.-10. ARCANA (2014)

Arcana explores the painfully fragile and often perilous relationship between humans and the secrets of earth's abundant plant life. The music often does so from the perspective of the plants themselves, with healing herbs as protagonists of a story that begins with a dire warning, and ends with the faith that wisdom and grace shall ultimately triumph.

In the pursuit of better health, a "healing crisis" can occur, during which someone may feel even worse after the start of a curative regime, before they feel better. Accordingly, the eight movements



of this suite journey through some very dark and frightening places before arriving to the light. The toxins of conflict are a powerful subject, whether a struggle with one's inner demons, or a battle against outer threats to the wellbeing of our planet.

An everlasting mystery in both examples is the poignant attempt to achieve balance. Renowned herbalists Michael Tierra and his wife Lesley are among those who succeed in this challenge beautifully, as they work to improve the bodies, minds and spirits of others while honoring the natural world, always respectful of its power to harm as well as to heal. Representing their shared passion through the sphere of music has been a passage of joy and discovery for which I'll always be grateful.

As above, so below; as within, so without. Creation is a form of magic. The world of roots seeking good soil, and leaves turning upward to pure air, is one that we must protect, always.

With loving gratitude to Michael and Lesley Tierra.

11.-15. PIANO SUITE NO. 1: THE RESONANCE OF CHILDHOOD (1996)

Piano Suite No. 1: The Resonance of Childhood was composed as a set of personal reflections exploring early years, difficult parental relationships, and ultimately the acceptance of complex emotions. Intentionally simple, this piece is a personal reflection of a childhood that remains unsettling. The opening set of variations sets the tone for the entire Suite: searching and hope that are met with the uncomfortable combination of disappointment and acquiescence. Of the five short movements, perhaps the most intimate is the fourth, entitled *For My Father*, which was written in response to my beloved father Ivan's descent into dementia.

With thanks to Zita Carno and Dorothy Spafard Hull for first bringing these notes to audiences.

16. INTERMEZZO (1998)

Intermezzo was composed as a response to the waves of the ocean, and as a reflection on the flow of a more introspective, emotional sea. A long and lyrical theme floats above a steadily rolling line, perhaps as a lengthy branch of kelp might dance from the force of each coming tide.

17. CHORD HISTORY (2014)

Pianist Susanne Kessel shares something significant with one of our mutual muses, Ludwig van Beethoven: they both hail from Bonn, Germany. Eyeing the upcoming occasion of Beethoven's 250th birth year in 2020, Susanne devised a beautiful plan: to shepherd 250 short new pieces of piano music into the world in the composer's honor, from the hearts of artists who would happily consider themselves among his protégés. If only Beethoven could know the enduring power of his legacy.

So what better way to compose an homage to this giant, than to ask the devoted pianist for whom I was writing the piece what some of her favorite Beethoven piano chords might be? I knew the answer to mine: the iconic, imposing, foreboding, C minor start to Sonata No. 8, Opus 13, the *Pathétique*. My teenage hands passionately played each phrase thousands of times, and while poor Ludwig might have been rolling over in his grave (there's a good reason I chose to compose rather than perform), the influence of his music in my life has been monumental.

Susanne submitted several fine suggestions, which a keen ear might discover throughout my little offering, as I retained the precise voicing of each chosen chord. And thus Beethoven, Kessel, and Shapiro have become bound for a brief and touching moment in this *Chord History*.

Dedicated to Susanne Kessel, and Ludwig van Beethoven, for the occasion of the 250th anniversary of his birth, in 2020.

18. LUVINA (2007)

"Wherever you look in Luvina, it's a very sad place. You're going there, so you'll find out. I would say it's the place where sadness nests... the breeze that blows there moves it around but never takes it away." Such is the bleak world described in Juan Rulfo's short story, *Luvina*. When pianist Ana Cervantes asked me to compose a piece in response to the late Mexican author's writing, I had not read any of his work and looked forward to the books that would soon appear in my mailbox. Sitting in my studio, immersed in the grim desert of dire poverty and hopelessness Rulfo describes in this and other equally moving writings, I cried. Long since finishing the music, my thoughts still return to a landscape that is unspeakably sad and, through Rulfo's words, a place where slow and insistent burdens are met with simple, unquestioning acceptance.

With enduring gratefulness to Ana Cervantes, and with great respect to the memory of Juan Rulfo.

19.-21. SONATA FOR PIANO (1999)

Sonata for Piano is loosely written in the structural tradition of many classical sonatas. The first movement, *Moderato*, explores two themes that are first developed independently and ultimately are interwoven as two parts of a whole. A set of jazz harmonies are implied against more angular melodic lines. The second movement, *Lento; Andante*, takes the listener on an emotional, dreamlike journey leading to a passionate outburst, and the final movement, *Scherzo*, is just that—an impish romp.


With appreciation to Barbara Burgan for performing an earlier version of this piece when I shifted my composing career in the late '90s from commercial media to concert music, and with sincere thanks to Teresa McCollough, who included the final version on her debut album, New American Piano Music (Innova 630).

About Alex Shapiro:

Alex Shapiro (b. New York City, 1962) aligns note after note with the hope that at least a few of them will actually sound good next to each other. Her persistence at this activity, as well as non-fiction writing about the music business, public speaking, arts advocacy volunteerism, wildlife photography, and the shameless instigation of insufferable puns on social media, has led to a happy life. Drawing from a broad musical palette that giddily ignores genre, Alex's acoustic and electroacoustic works for small chamber groups and large ensembles are published by Activist Music LLC, performed and broadcast daily, and can be found on over thirty commercial releases from record labels around the world.



Ms. Shapiro was elected in 2014 to the Symphonic & Concert writer seat on the Board of Directors of ASCAP, and she is a board member of the ASCAP Foundation. She also serves as a board member of The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, and is a former board member of other U.S. non-profit organizations including The American Music Center, the American Composers Forum of Los Angeles, The MacDowell Colony, and The Society of Composers & Lyricists.



Educated at The Juilliard School and Manhattan School of Music as a student of Ursula Mamlok and John Corigliano, Shapiro moved from Manhattan to Los Angeles in 1983, beginning her career composing for commercial media before switching her focus to the concert music world in the late 90s. In 2007 Alex traded the traffic and wildfires of Malibu for the puddle jumpers and wildlife of Washington State's remote San Juan Island. From her home on the water's edge, Alex procrastinates on her next piece by pointing her camera at anything with paws, claws, hooves, tentacles, or fins. The resulting, award-winning photos are increasingly part of Shapiro's multimedia electroacoustic works and can be experienced separately and together on her website, www.alexshapiro.org.

Thoughts from Alex:

It's not every day that composers have the opportunity to produce an album of their heart's emotional output for the instrument to which they feel the most affinity. I'm a very enthusiastic pianist, but not a particularly gifted one. I began composing when I was nine (trust me, I was no Mozart), and began a decade of private piano study a year later. Already devoted to composition, I had no desire to become a professional pianist (the penciled admonition, "Don't get loud and bangy!!" was emblazoned in 1977 atop the first page of my tattered score for Bach's Italian Concerto. Not the harbinger of a promising career.) But thanks to the superb repertoire choices made by my patient teacher, the late New York recitalist Marshall Kreisler, I loved to play, and I'm reminded of how he broadened my sonic world every time I sit down to revisit those pieces.

This recording project might not have happened had it not been for Elizabeth Etnoyer, a doctoral student at West Virginia University who stumbled upon my music, resonated with it, and decided to make my entire catalog of piano works the sole subject of her 2015 dissertation. I was composing *Arcana* when Dr. Etnoyer first contacted me, and was especially pleased to have completed this meaningful suite in time for it to be included in her book. Upon the publication of *The Keyboard Works of Alex Shapiro*, I realized that I wanted to create a unified collection of definitive performances of these very personal offerings.

My fondness for Adam Marks is boundless, as is my respect and admiration for him as an exquisite, focused, emotional, exacting, and gifted pianist. His piercingly accurate insights into my most poignant passages made for deeply satisfying rehearsal and recording sessions that occasionally morphed into therapy sessions, which morphed into laughter, which triangulated right back into his amazing interpretations. I'm filled with gratitude for the enthusiasm and love Adam has brought to this project.

Two of the works on this album—the *Piano Suite* and the *Sonata*—represent a pivotal time in my career, when in my later 30s after scoring a film with a chamber orchestra, I realized that my passion had strayed from the commercial media jobs that had been my livelihood for the previous fifteen years, and had made a beeline toward a love of composing chamber music. The seeds of the themes in these two works were written when I was a 19-year-old composition student at Manhattan School of Music. Nearly two decades later I pulled the yellowed manuscripts from a long-forgotten envelope, placed them on my piano desk to play through, cringed at all the poorly written passages and... noticed a few decent spots. Like a happy little dung beetle coveting used material that's bound to be good for something, I rolled my old ideas into fresh versions of the music, using creative tools acquired from life experience that youth can't provide. These were among the first handful of pieces which launched my gratifying life in the concert music world.

I am indebted to each and every pianist who has placed faith in these notes, and in me as a writer. This is a collaborative art, and the intentions of the sounds that rattle in my head are only realized by the efforts of musicians who grasp what it is I'm attempting to communicate.

About Adam Marks:

Praised as an “excellent pianist” with “titanic force” (New York Times), **Adam Marks** is an active soloist, collaborator, music director, curator, and educator based in NYC. He has appeared as soloist with the Mission Chamber Orchestra, Manchester Symphony Orchestra, the National Repertory Orchestra, and at notable venues including Salle Cortot, Carnegie Hall, Miller Theatre, Logan Center for the Arts, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Millennium Park, Ravinia, and Davies Symphony Hall.



Recent premieres include playing/conducting Rachel J. Peters' *Companionship* at Fort Worth Opera, and performing/co-creating *Black Queen* with Juraj Kojš and Jennifer Beattie in Miami and Copenhagen. He is a laureate of the Orleans Competition for contemporary music in Orleans, France, and his premiere of Holly Harrison's “Lobster Tales and Turtle Soup” with Eighth Blackbird won the Australian Art Music Awards Performance of the Year in 2018. He made his off-Broadway debut in Fiasco Theatre's acclaimed revival of *Into The Woods* at Roundabout Theatre. Other recent international performances include recitals in Australia, Brazil, Singapore, France, and Croatia.



Adam serves as the founding co-director of Artists at Albatross Reach, an arts residency/incubator in Gualala, California. As half of Albatross (his duo with vocalist Jennifer Beattie), he has been an Artist-In-Residence with the Yale College Department of Music Composers' Seminar since 2006. He has held faculty positions at Carthage College and NYU, and was a founding faculty member of both New Music On The Point and the Fresh Inc festival. He has given guest lectures and masterclasses at Yale, The Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music, Northwestern, Mannes, SMU, CU Boulder, The Colburn School, the LaSalle School for the Arts in Singapore, and the Zagreb Conservatory. He holds an undergraduate degree from Brandeis University, a Masters from Manhattan School of Music, and a Ph.D. in Piano Performance from New York University with research in works for vocalizing pianist. His teachers include Sara Davis Buechner, Anthony de Mare, Donn-Alexandre Feder, Evan Hirsch, and Lois Banke. Adam proudly plays Yamaha pianos and Schoenhut toy pianos. Learn more at www.adammarks.com.

Thoughts from Adam:

It has been a privilege to live with the works of Alex Shapiro these past few years. To record someone's complete catalog for piano is to live with their history—their ups and downs—and to listen to the world through their ears. Alex's ears have intrigued me since I first played *Spark* many years ago; it's not often you find an elegiac work that focuses on someone's energy and light. But at the root of all of Alex's works is her stunning relationship to the elements. She's surrounded by water at home, and connected to the earth yet constantly soaring above the clouds in her travels.

Alex and I first crossed paths when I lived in Chicago, serving as the pianist and Director of Artistic Operations for Fifth House Ensemble. A generous commissioner asked her to write us a piece, and a dectet titled *Archipelago* landed in our laps. While there wasn't a piano part at the time (due to space constraints at the venue), our friendship blossomed as I helped the ensemble prepare for the premiere. Shortly thereafter I learned that my brother, composer Craig Marks, had known and respected Alex for years. Our professional lives continued to overlap and intertwine as I relocated back to NYC, her birthplace, and programmed *Spark* as much as I could. Needless to say, it was an honor to be asked to interpret her other works in this project, and I look forward to discovering what she creates next.

CREDITS

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For more details about these pieces and this album project,
please visit: www.alexshapiro.org/ArcanaAlbum.html



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