

ETHEL + THE
ROBERT RIVER
MIRABAL ER



Early in the morning, one of Robert's daughters dips a pitcher into the Rio Pueblo, for the day's drinking water. The pitcher is set on the kitchen counter, next to mason jars of ground herbs picked wild from the mountain. While some of us tune our instruments and stretch our bodies, others chop vegetables, tend to a pot of chai tea on the stove, or visit the horse corral to greet Spirit and the dogs.

We leave drums out in the sun to raise their pitch, or rub the skins with water to lower it. Some songs have fully notated articulation and dynamics, some have rough forms written on workshop scrap, and some are completely improvised. When thunderclouds come in the afternoon, we break to take in the experience and record the sound. Time is on our side; we have five days.

It's August, and even at this elevation it's hot, although the river stays cold throughout the day. We've taken over the house with microphones, preamps, cables, and the instruments of a string quartet; so many examples of human technique

flowering into precision. Especially in this place, these tools feel like vessels, designed to carry our idea and intention through sound and time, intact to the listener.

This record is a few things. It's a collection of songs, a milestone in a seven-year collaboration, and the reflection of a spiritual journey. It's also our meditation on the primacy of water, of the River – sacred lifeblood treasure, at once powerful and fragile. Its oneness makes it difficult to protect; its ubiquity makes it difficult to revere.

More than anything, this record is our highest and best effort to capture in music the feeling of traveling halfway across the country to jump headlong into the Rio Pueblo.

Thank you for listening.

ETHEL

New York City, 2016



An Kha Na (Mirabal)

In Tiwa, the lyric “An Kha Na, Hup’o Hwe’ap’ ap, Hwe-sam Ae-i, Anma hu-mi” translates as “My mother, who goes to find the flowers from behind the secret lake, I love you.” Singing this piece with choirs around the country has been a powerful highlight of our collaboration.

Tuvan Ride (ETHEL + Mirabal)

The melody for this tune popped up during a snowy spring residency. We took an afternoon walk through Denison University’s nature preserve, and couldn’t stop singing it. No one was surprised when Robert turned out to be great on the didgeridoo, but it was still a watershed moment when he took this righteous solo.

Skywatchers (Words: Mirabal, Music: ETHEL)

This poem, and much of ETHEL’s music, may be summed up by the axiom: “Look up. Be aware.”

Chant (ETHEL + Jeff Peterson)

An homage to the source of the bond between us, this piece is based on a song which is sung everywhere in the Hawaiian Islands, and was brought to us by Jeff Peterson, Grammy-winning slack-key guitarist, who collaborated with us all in building the show, *TruckStop: The Beginning*, which also brought ETHEL and Mirabal together for the first time, in 2008. The original song infuses every layer of the counterpoint, to which everyone contributed.

Peace Calls (ETHEL + Mirabal, Owee Rae)

At a peak moment in our process of creation, as drums and shakers filled the air, Kip steadied the room with the simplest of gestures – one note in a patient, walking tempo, on the mandolin. Out of the din rose voices - our voices, all voices — each making the declaration of its own Truth, unique, yet united. It was clearly a kind of Credo, central to this project, to which all voices are welcome.

Clean Dirge, Dirty Dirge (Jones)

The composer writes: This tune serves a couple of purposes: Cory loves to play high up on the G string, and Robert and I love beating the snot out of big drums. Hans Zimmer, eat your heart out!

Run For Rain (Words: Mirabal, Music: Jones + Lawson)

Dorothy, Kip and Robert recorded this poem early in the morning, before the band was assembled, much like a runner rises early to get in a few miles before the day begins.

Rana Run (Farris)

The composer writes: The voices of the river – the creatures chatter and chitter. The traveler listens, the traveler sings to them, with them. A song that carries ever on - just there – even as the river under, undercurrent pulls to speed and white... The traveler will follow, will flow, will fall. Rapid. Rip. Rock and Tree and Rushing, Rushing into Swirl and Foam and Drop...

Tsintskaro Memory (Farris)

The composer writes: Tsintskaro is a Georgian folk song. The title translates as “at the spring water.” This ancient tune has stayed with me since I first heard it sung in a Tbilisi monastery in 1988, and it is now for me a ghost of simpler days. Robert’s flute gives me new access to those experiences long faded; in his sound, I find peace, and I find hope, as I commune with the promise of yesterday’s dreams.

In the Eyes of E (ETHEL + Mirabal)

Estevanico, a Berber enslaved by the Portuguese as a youth, explored the new world with Pánfilo de Narváez and later served as a guide to Friar Marcos de Niza through what is now the American Southwest. This song is inspired by his story, performed by Robert, Kip, and Dorothy in trio.

Jay-Red (Jones)

The composer writes: To make a Jay-Red, take equal parts erudition and stank, a decent measure of Good Friends having a Good Time, a sprig of string noise, and shake with a crushed distortion pedal. Serve in a warm tube compressor with a garnish of theatrical footwork.

Marshmallow Experiment Fails (Farris)

Wi-wa (Traditional)

Wi-wa is a children's song, so old that its lyrics' exact meaning has been forgotten. The subject of the song is a woodland animal who sits in a tree, pelting passersby with seeds or shells. The word "tiit-za", at the very end, is onomatopoeia for throwing the seed.

TSOMA (Jones)

The composer writes: TSOMA was written late one night, when I felt that I had been wasting too much time. The title is an initialism for "time sitting on my a—"; the spirit of the song is to get audience members up onto their feet, and thus off their collective a—. We were all listening to a lot of Trencito de los Andes when I wrote this, and I hoped to give us a little of that good mojo.

Gat'té (Lawson)

This sublime prayer, or Sanskrit mantra, is found at the end of a brief, but classic Buddhist scripture, The Heart of the Prajna Paramita Sutra, often called The Heart Sutra or The Great Heart of Wisdom Sutra, where 'Prajna' means "wisdom", and 'Paramita' means a crossing over, or going beyond. On the trip toward enlightenment, the destination may not be an end, but the trip itself.

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Ralph Farris - How Far Publishing (ASCAP)

Kip Jones - klete m anndan w (ASCAP)

Robert Mirabal Publishing:

Yellow Aspen Cloud Music/BMI

Jeff Peterson Publishing:

Art And Soul Music (ASCAP)

ETHEL endorses the AVID family of software solutions.

Ralph Farris endorses Glasser bows and D'Addario strings.

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ETHEL

Ralph Farris viola / voice / kalimba / shaker

Kip Jones violin / low-strung violin / voice / mandolin / shaker / drum

Corin Lee violin / voice / shaker

Dorothy Lawson cello / voice / shaker

ROBERT MIRABAL

voice / flutes / didgeridoo / shaker / drum

Aspen, Kona, and Masa Mirabal

voices (An Kha Na, Peace Calls, Wi-Wa)

Recorded August 10-14, 2015 at Estancia Mirabal,
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1	AN KHA NA	5:13
2	TUVAN RIDE	4:25
3	SKYWATCHERS	3:55
4	CHANT	6:18
5	PEACE CALLS	5:40
6	CLEAN DIRGE, DIRTY DIRGE	2:38
7	RUN FOR RAIN	3:41
8	RANA RUN	3:22
9	TSINTSKARO MEMORY	3:17
10	IN THE EYES OF E	4:09
11	JAY-RED	4:46
12	MARSHMALLOW EXPERIMENT FAILS	0:24
13	WI-WA	2:08
14	TSOMA	3:25
15	GAT'TÉ	6:57
		60:21



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