



# FLUX AND FIRE



ROBERT GIBSON

**Twelve Poems (2004)**

James Stern, violin  
Audrey Andrist, piano

- |    |            |      |
|----|------------|------|
| 1  | Aura       | 1:27 |
| 2  | Wind Chime | 1:10 |
| 3  | Cloudburst | 0:57 |
| 4  | Reflection | 2:21 |
| 5  | 2:3        | 0:40 |
| 6  | Waves      | 1:04 |
| 7  | Hommage    | 1:14 |
| 8  | Entropy    | 1:05 |
| 9  | Barcarolle | 1:24 |
| 10 | Shoal      | 0:48 |
| 11 | Quatrain   | 1:23 |
| 12 | Octave     | 1:41 |

**Soundings (2001)**

Robert Oppelt, Richard Barber,  
Jeffrey Weisner, Ali Kian Yazdanfar, double bass

- |    |            |      |
|----|------------|------|
| 13 | Tenuous    | 2:23 |
| 14 | Diaphanous | 3:01 |
| 15 | Nebulous   | 2:45 |
| 16 | Luminous   | 3:03 |
| 17 | Capricious | 2:33 |

18 **Night Music (2002)** 3:53

Eric Kutz, violoncello

19 **Flux and Fire (2006)** 11:13

Aeolus Quartet:  
Nicholas Tavani, Rachel Shapiro, violin  
Gregory Luce, viola  
Alan Richardson, violoncello

20 **Night Music (2002)** 3:52

Katherine Murdock, viola

21 **Offrande (1996)** 9:11

Aeolus Quartet

22 **Night Music (2002)** 3:48

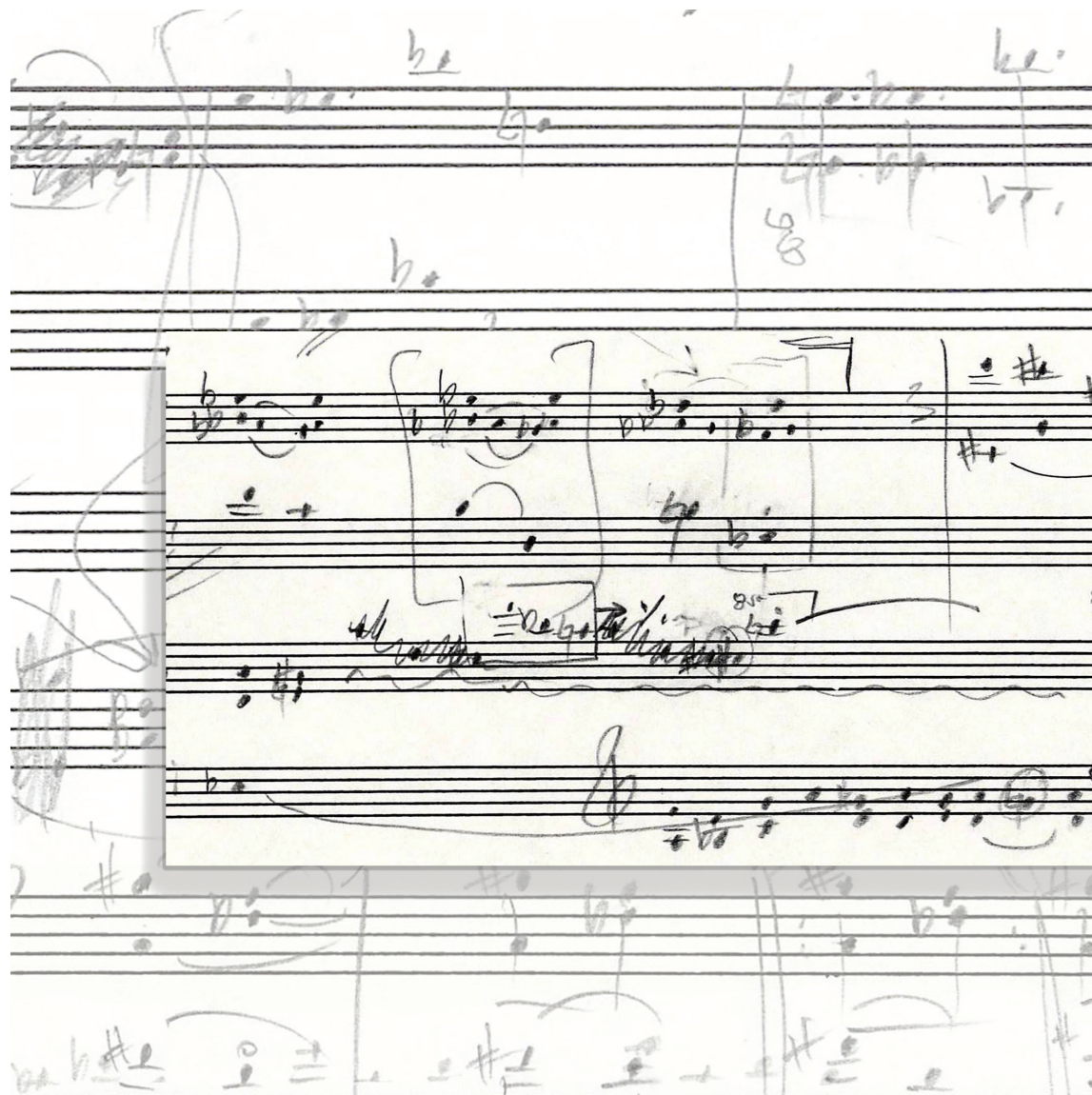
James Stern, violin

Total: 60:54





Schoodic Peninsula  
Acadia National Park



Offrande sketches (1996)

*Luxury, impulse! I draft a phrase  
and believe it protects me from this icy world,  
that goes through my body like a shoal of sardines.*

—Alain Bosquet

“Regrets” (excerpt) from *No Matter No Fact*  
translation by Edouard Roditi

My music has often been guided by imagery and emotion from poems that I have come to know and love. The boundaries between the arts are fluid, and the metaphor that for me most aptly illuminates this relationship—and the process of composition—is the act of translation. Matthew Reynolds posits that languages are not separated from each other “like islands in a sea,” but “are more like the undulations of a desert” where usages can accumulate into dunes and then trail off into other forms and variations. Poetry uses language in a way that speaks beyond the meaning and syntax of words. Transforming mental images, whether originally from an internal or external source, into physical sound is to explore the continuum of connections that embody creative activity.

Paul Muldoon’s poem “The Briefcase” was the initial inspiration for my *Twelve Poems*. In this short poem, he reflects, while waiting for a bus, on the possibility of “the first inkling” of this poem (inside his briefcase) being swept from his side on a city street in Manhattan by the rushing water of a sudden cloudburst and further to “strike out along the East River/ for the sea. By which I mean the ‘open’ sea.”

In writing these short movements for violin and piano, I was seeking an analogue for the ability of the poet to capture a particular moment and, further, an idea—more or less abstract—about the materials of the art and its forms. As with poetry, the focus is on sound as much as structure: “Cloudburst” is after Muldoon’s wonderful poem; both contemplation and the physical image of





a mirror are implied in “Reflection,” which is a palindrome. The harmonic relationship of the perfect fifth in the overtone series is 2:3, a relationship that can also be expressed rhythmically. “Hommage” is my miniature tribute to Claude Debussy, the composer who has most influenced my conception of musical form. His last work, the sonata for violin and piano, is, for me, music that approaches perfection, and a suggestion of the piece appears in this movement.

The preferred, although perhaps less known definition of “shoal” refers to a school of fish. This word always reminds me of my favorite lines from Alain Bosquet’s poem “Regrets” that appear above. “Quatrain” and “Octave,” poetic terms for the number of lines in a stanza or poem, relate to the number of phrases (four and eight respectively) in these movements. In addition, the harmonic interval of the octave is ubiquitous in the concluding movement. *Twelve Poems* was written for James Stern and Audrey Andrist, to whom the work is affectionately dedicated.

My identity as a composer is deeply connected to my experience as a performer. The physical, mental and emotional aspects of creating sound on a musical instrument are deeply intertwined with my compositional impulses. Most of my music has been written for colleagues and friends, and their musical voices and personalities are an integral part of the images that form, and inform, my creative work.

I began piano lessons at age five and also played the trombone in middle and high school band until my junior year. My first experience of the bass as the instrument I wanted to play was hearing recordings of Eugene Wright with the Dave Brubeck Quartet and Ron Carter with the Miles Davis Quintet. The warmth, depth, richness, the long resonance and decay of plucked sounds, and the unusual intensity of the high register of the double bass are among the distinctive characteristics that attracted me to the instrument at the age of fifteen.

The title of my double bass quartet, *Soundings*, is a reference in part to the nautical term for measuring the depth of water. This term has an obvious connection to the double bass as the “deepest” sounding string instrument of the orchestra. The sound of the double bass results in part from the fact that, while it is the largest of orchestral stringed instruments, it should be larger to sound as low as it does. Because of its size, the double bass is a physically demanding instrument to play with facility, although each generation of “modern” bassists has advanced the technique to the astounding level that one can hear today from soloists, jazz and pop artists, and orchestral bassists.

The five movements of my bass quartet are a personal exploration of the instrument that is closest to me in my life as a musician. *Soundings* is dedicated to Robert Oppelt, Richard Barber, Jeffrey Weisner and Ali Kian Yazdanfar, who commissioned this work, and who were all members of the National Symphony Orchestra at the time of this commission.

*Night Music* was commissioned by the Friday Morning Music Club of Washington, D.C. as the required work for the Third Triennial Johansen International Competition for Young String Players (2003). This prestigious competition is for young performers ages 13–17, and in 2003 the judges were James Buswell, Heidi Castleman and Aldo Parisot. The requirements for the commissioned work were related to duration (short) and that the work be suitable for performance on violin, viola or violoncello without any instrument-specific editing to the piece (other than transposition). To my mind, the unique timbral qualities of each of these three instruments are so pronounced that the piece is heard anew with each of the distinguished performers on this disc. I wanted to capture a fleeting glimpse of lyricism and technical virtuosity arising from a soloist inspired by the mystery and poetry of the night.



*All things change to fire,  
and fire exhausted  
falls back into things*

—Heraclitus

No 22 (excerpt) from *Fragments*  
translation by Brooks Haxton

My second string quartet, *Flux and Fire*, was commissioned by The Stony Brook Contemporary Chamber Players for their 19th Annual Premieres Concert (November 2006) on campus and in New York City. The title of the work is related to a “fragment” of Heraclitus in Brooks Haxton’s luminous translation above. Heraclitus (sixth century, BC) was prescient in his understanding of the nature of energy in the universe.

While writing this piece I began listening to Paul Rusesabagina’s extraordinary account of his personal experience during the Rwandan genocide of 1994 (*An Ordinary Man* as an audiobook on CD). Listening to a story being told is an ancient and visceral experience, and the rhythm and cadence of the reading made the goodness and evil in the account palpable. While there is no specific program to my piece, the turbulent and sometimes feverish imagery from this memoir accounts for the substantial presence of these qualities in my quartet.

The dark but transcendent imagery of the last stanza from Alain Bosquet’s poem “Regrets” quoted above has often been very close to me, but never more than in 1996 with the loss of my sister-in-law after a four-year struggle with cancer. I was also quite saddened at this time by the news of Toru Takemitsu’s death, since his music has been a profound influence in my own development as a composer. My “offering” (after Varèse’s beautiful pieces of the same name) is in honor, and



in celebration, of these two lives—one in my family, and one whose musical path I have found most compelling. Those familiar with Takemitsu's *Garden Rain* of 1974 (for brass ensemble) will perhaps recognize the quotation of the haunting melody (solo muted trumpet) which occurs near the end of his piece, and in my quartet (in the second violin) also near the conclusion, following an extended ensemble passage in harmonics. *Offrande* is dedicated to the memory of Karen van Rossum (1949–96).

The structure of my music is often based on images of transformation since it is in the transience of sound that music's deepest beauty is revealed. The poet Stanley Kunitz captured the ultimate experience of transformation in the opening sentence of his "Reflections" from *The Collected Poems*: "Years ago I came to the realization that the most poignant of all lyric tensions stems from the awareness that we are living and dying at once." Indeed, the poignance of this awareness is singular. It also intensifies the experience and mystery of living on this beautiful planet. Kunitz concludes his "Reflections" with an artistic aspiration: "I dream of an art so transparent that you can look through and see the world." This dream evokes for me the ineffable in nature—the feeling of distant thunder offshore; the smell of the rain that strikes your face with the approaching squall; flux and fire incarnate. I want to drink from the storm.

—Robert Gibson

#### SOURCES

Bosquet, Alain. *No Matter No Fact*. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1988.

Heraclitus. *Fragments*. Translated by Brooks Haxton. New York: Penguin Books, 2001.

Kunitz, Stanley. *The Collected Poems*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

Muldoon, Paul. *Poems 1968–1998*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.

Reynolds, Matthew. *Translation: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

**Robert Gibson** (b. 1950, Atlanta, GA) has had performances of his compositions throughout the United States and in Europe, China and South America. His music has also been presented on National Public Radio and by noted performers and ensembles, including bassists Lucas Drew and Bertram Turetzky; clarinetists Esther Lamneck and Nathan Williams; pianists Santiago Rodriguez, Marilyn Nonken and Audrey Andrist; the Stern/Andrist Duo, the Clarion Wind Quintet, Prism Brass Quintet, the Contemporary Music Forum, VERGE Ensemble, the 21st Century Consort, the Meridian String Quartet, the Aeolus Quartet, the Romanian State Orchestra under guest conductor Jeffrey Silberschlag, and the University of Maryland Symphony Orchestra under James Ross.

Mr. Gibson has been a composer member of the Contemporary Music Forum of Washington, D.C. (1987–2001). As a jazz bassist he performed with many international artists in the early '80s, including Mose Allison, Tom Harrell, Bob Berg, Marc Copland, and Barney Kessel. Mr. Gibson's compositions have been recorded on Golden Crest (*The American Music Project*, Clarion Wind Quintet, 1979) and Spectrum Records (*Soundscapes*, 1982; *Music of Robert Gibson*, 1986). *Chamber Music* (1995), a Capstone compact disc of his chamber works appeared on *Fanfare* magazine's Want List as one of critic William Zagorski's five notable recordings of the year. Mr. Gibson has been a resident composer at the Alba (Italy) Music Festival (2011–13). He is Professor and former Director (2005–16) of the School of Music at the University of Maryland, College Park. He lives with his wife, Barbara, in Olney, Maryland and Birch Harbor, Maine.

Hailed by the *Washington Post* for "virtuosity and penetrating intelligence," violinist **James Stern** has performed at the National Gallery, Smithsonian Museums, Phillips Collection, the Library of Congress, and the White House with the Smithsonian Chamber Players and VERGE Ensemble, with whom he has also toured internationally. He has performed at the Marlboro and Ravinia festivals. His solo Bach CD is available on Albany Records. He tours nationally with the trio Strata



(with pianist Audrey Andrist and clarinetist Nathan Williams). A former faculty member at the Cleveland Institute, he is now Professor at the University of Maryland. He coaches ensembles and conducts the strings at the National Orchestral Institute.

Canadian pianist **Audrey Andrist** grew up in Saskatchewan, and while in high school, traveled three hours one-way for lessons with William Moore, himself a former student of famed musicians Cécile Genhart and Rosina Lhévinne. She studied at the Juilliard School with Herbert Stessin, winning the Mozart International, San Antonio International, and Juilliard Concerto Competitions. A member of the Stern/Andrist Duo with her husband, violinist James Stern, and Strata, a trio with Stern and clarinetist Nathan Williams, Ms. Andrist can be heard on over a dozen recordings, including a critically acclaimed solo Schumann CD for Centaur Records. She teaches at UMBC and the Washington Conservatory.

**Katherine Murdock** has performed throughout the world with the Mendelssohn String Quartet, Music from Marlboro, Boston Chamber Music Society, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, and Boston Musica Viva. She has been a guest of the Guarneri, Emerson, and Vermeer quartets, and has performed live for West German Radio, BBC, NPR Performance Today, St. Paul Sunday and NBC's Today Show. Currently Associate Professor at the University of Maryland, Ms. Murdock has served on the faculties of Boston Conservatory, Longy School, the Hartt School, SUNY Stony Brook, Artist-in-Residence at Harvard University, and the Yellow Barn and Kneisel Hall summer festivals. She is a member of the Left Bank Quartet and for twenty-one years was violist of the Los Angeles Piano Quartet.

Cellist **Eric Kutz** has captivated audiences across North America, Asia and Europe. He is on the faculty of the University of Maryland School of Music, where he holds the Barbara K. Steppel Memorial Faculty Fellowship in cello. He is active as a teacher, a chamber musician, an orchestral musician and a concerto soloist. His diverse collaborations cut across musical styles, and have ranged from cellist Yo-Yo Ma to jazz great Ornette Coleman. Mr. Kutz is a member of the Murasaki Duo, a cello and piano ensemble that has released three commercial CDs and regularly performs on chamber music series throughout the nation. He holds degrees from the Juilliard School and Rice University.

**Robert Oppelt** joined the National Symphony Orchestra bass section in 1982 at the invitation of Music Director Mstislav Rostropovich, and he has since served as Assistant and Principal Bass. With the NSO he has performed Mozart's *Per queste belle mani*, Paganini's *Moses Fantasy* and Koussevitsky's *Concerto for Double Bass*. Chamber music collaborators include Yo-Yo Ma, Hilary Hahn, Guarneri String Quartet and Kennedy Center Chamber Players. He is a 1982 graduate of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, with additional studies at Brevard and Tanglewood music centers. Currently a teacher at the University of Maryland, he is also an avid sailor.

**Richard Barber** was born into a family of musicians and educators. While also cultivating a love of science, he ultimately decided that music was his primary passion. After attending Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, he began his orchestral career with the Phoenix Symphony. Three years later he was appointed Assistant Principal Bass of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C. He is also active as a member of the Grand Teton Music Festival, the Eclipse Chamber Orchestra and the 21st Century Consort. He teaches both privately and at the University of Maryland. He plays an Italian bass made c. 1620 in Italy by the Brescian master Giovanni Paolo Maggini. He lives in Maryland with his wife, mezzo-soprano Marta Kirilloff Barber, and their children.

**Jeffrey Weisner** joined the National Symphony Orchestra bass section in 1995. He is active in venues around the region and the country as a performer and teacher. From 1991 to 1993, Mr. Weisner was a member of the New World Symphony in Miami, and from 1993 to 1995, he was a member of the Delaware Symphony. From 2005-2017, he was on the double bass faculty of the Peabody Conservatory. Mr. Weisner is dedicated to creating and supporting new music. His solo album *Neomonology*, released in 2012 on Innova Records, features three works which he commissioned and premiered. He also supported the creation of nine new multi-bass pieces by Peabody student composers during his tenure at the school.

One of the most prominent double bassists of his generation, **Ali Kian Yazdanfar** maintains an active career not only as an orchestral double bassist, but also as a soloist, chamber musician and pedagogue. Although he started playing the bass at 7 years old, his science and mathematics background led to a physics degree from The Johns Hopkins University, and, directly upon graduating, he won his first audition to become a member of the Houston Symphony. He went on to win his next three auditions, for the National Symphony in Washington, D.C., for principal bass with the San Francisco Symphony, and for principal bass with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, his current position.

Praised by the *Baltimore Sun* for combining “smoothly meshed technique with a sense of spontaneity and discovery,” the **Aeolus Quartet** is committed to presenting time-seasoned masterworks and new cutting-edge works to widely diverse audiences with equal freshness, dedication and fervor. Violinists **Nicholas Tavani** and **Rachel Shapiro**, violist **Gregory Luce**, and cellist **Alan Richardson** formed the Aeolus Quartet in 2008 at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Since its inception, the all-American quartet has been awarded prizes at nearly every major competition in the United States and performed across the globe with showings “worthy of a major-league quartet” (Scott Cantrell, *Dallas Morning News*). Mark Satola of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* writes, “A rich and warm tone combined with precise

ensemble playing (that managed also to come across as fluid and natural), and an impressive musical intelligence guided every technical and dramatic turn.” The Aeolus Quartet was the 2013–15 Graduate Resident String Quartet at the Juilliard School, and the quartet members currently make their home in New York City.

The Quartet has performed across North America, Europe and Asia in venues such as Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Reinberger Recital Hall at Severance Hall, Merkin Hall, the Library of Congress, Renwick Gallery, St. Martin-in-the-Fields and the Shanghai Oriental Arts Center. The Aeolus Quartet has released two critically acclaimed albums of classical and contemporary works through the Longhorn/Naxos label which are available on iTunes, Amazon, and major retailers worldwide.

## **CREDITS**

Producers: Robert Gibson and Antonino D’Urzo

Engineering and mastering: Antonino D’Urzo

Photography: Astrid Riecken (composer’s hand/bass and portrait);

Robert Gibson (Schoodic Peninsula)

Design: Barbara and Robert Gibson

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Innova Director: Philip Blackburn

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*For Barbara*

