

I overheard a friend once trying to describe my style to someone asking what my music was 'like'. He hesitated, backtracked a lot, and couldn't quite say with any conviction whether it was tonal or not, consonant or strident, lyrical or angular, consistent or scattered. I decided I needed a brief **Musical Specimen** (2011) featuring some of my favorite timbres to help the argument along.

We all get tunes stuck in our heads; this is what happened to me with **There were three Ravens** published by Thomas Ravenscroft (1592-1635) on which I based a series of pieces. This first one, from 2011, was composed in memory of William Baines (1899-1922) whose ability to fuse multiple tonal languages I greatly admire. The folk ballad upon which my four variations and reprise are based is both cynical and sad, illustrating a practical side of mortality that is rarely commented on – it sometimes means a meal for the living!

I have long promoted the ideal of the two-movement composition. As such, my **Sonata for Violoncello and Piano** from 2007 represents a contribution to this modest body of literature. After a petulant first movement and a recitative-ostinato-monologue second I felt no urge towards a gratuitous 'finale'. A transitional piece overall, it stands between the earlier aggressive *Egloga* for violin and piano (2006) and my later chamber works with strings.

Shortly after arriving in Duluth to take up my teaching position at the University, I walked the halls and imagined all of the bodies that had come and gone over the years. Even before teaching a single class I contemplated that one day, as an older man, I too would walk out one of the doors and disappear. **A Waltz through the Vapor** began that summer (1998) and was subsequently revised (2003/04) as more and more layers of gossamer threads seemed necessary on the surface.

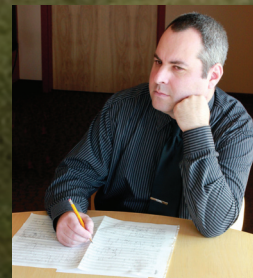
**Waltz** for violoncello and piano was premiered in 2005 on an all-Russian program. As such I wanted to present an aural image of the grand ballrooms of 19th century Russia. The crystalline chandeliers, ornate ceilings, and flowing dresses are now faded with the melancholy of memories captured in dusty photos filled with faces long gone – an era of the past with faint, autumnal music resonating like an echo from the bottom of a well. An unabashed cousin to *A Waltz through the Vapor*, I find that many of my works give birth to other compositions and 'speak' to one another; here is such a case.

As a composer in my teens and early 20s I longed to be progressive but somehow through the curious lines of artistic invention I found myself in my late 20s and 30s writing waltzes amongst other unfashionable things. Granted these were not your typical waltzes but nonetheless this dance in three that morphs from one emotional state to the next while maintaining a reasonable and plastic rhythmic structure began creeping into many of my works often unbeknownst to me. As I reach towards unifying the characteristics of my tonal and non-tonal leanings into one cohesive language, the waltz and other "antiquated" structural models have been the theatre for many of my compositional struggles. It is of infinite joy that I have been fortunate to find musicians who have become both friends and comrades who understand this struggle and interpret its complexities with such finesse.

My father and I spent many an afternoon reflecting on life on the grounds of the historic home of our 26th President, Theodore Roosevelt. Even more wonderful than those days were the quiet drives along the north shore of Long Island I took with him. **The Still Waters of Sagamore Hill** was composed shortly after my last visit to the site, not having seen it for years after moving away. It is not really about the place, but all the many times I spent with my father travelling in mutual contemplation of life.

With the composition of dozens of individual shorter pieces for piano over the years, I began making 'piano albums' at somewhat regular intervals that brought some together with variable performable sequences. **Piano Album 2008**, the heart of this album, features five such works. **No.1** is perhaps my most sombre work for the piano and comes out of a period of study when I was immersed in Schubert. Within the set, **No.2** is texturally the most complicated, thematically the most diverse, expressively the most dynamic, and structurally the least secure. Guitarists may be familiar with the open notes E and A that begin the lyrical **No.3** as this was its origin: a short guitar prelude. I revisit many works, re-thinking the material and how it can be more fully developed within another timbral home. **No.4** reveals a bit of my roots as an organist, built from an untroubled trio texture and a little more than a tip of the hat to César Franck. **No.5** is a ternary form piece that was recast a year later for cello and piano in a work called *The Couple*; here the opening 'waltz' gives way to a finicky central section that gets noisier until it decides to halt its momentum and recede.

**Lullaby for Max** is from my *Piano Album 2006*. The note to the performer reads as follows: "begin quietly, but as we all know, trying to put a child to sleep can become a drama, eventually settling down of course...". A waltz for the evening.



chamber works featuring bassoon. Exceptional critical reception and acclaim led to the publication of a second recording in 2011, *Constellations* (MSR 1398) focusing on string music. In 2009 he was inducted into the Academy of Distinguished Teachers and honored with the Morse-Alumni Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education that represents the highest recognition by the University of its most distinguished scholar-teachers. A graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, Purchase College (New York), and the University of Arizona, Rubin is also active as a performer on organ and piano. His diverse concert repertoire and musicological concerns (ranging from Buxtehude and Schubert to Sorabji and Xenakis) has informed an eclectic compositional style, fusing a renewed perspective on traditional tonal structures with a command of contemporary technique. His works have been performed by numerous chamber ensembles and soloists throughout the United States and internationally; however his collaboration with Matthew McCright has been of particular significance and has been the first major interpreter of his solo piano music.

**JUSTIN RUBIN** is Professor of Music and Chair of the Composition and Theory Program at the University of Minnesota Duluth and Artistic Director of the UMD New Music Festival. Rubin released his first solo CD, *Nostalgia* (innova 738), in 2009 that included his

Justin Rubin

A Waltz Through the Vapor





American pianist **MATTHEW MCCRIGHT** has performed extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Asia and the South Pacific as piano soloist and chamber musician. He has devoted his life to performing works by living composers and has thrilled audiences and critics alike with an imaginative repertoire that spans both the traditional and a wide range of contemporary works. He has premiered numerous new pieces, many written for him, and has collaborated with countless composers across the globe. McCright currently resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota and is a member of the piano faculty of Carleton College while maintaining an active concert schedule as one of the most sought after pianists in contemporary music. Recent projects include the CD release of *Second Childhood* on the innova label and a disc of the piano works of Minnesota composer Gene Gutchē on Centaur Records. The recipient of numerous awards, grants, and prizes, he has performed at festivals such as Bang on a Can at MassMOCA, Printing House Festival of New Music (Dublin), Late Music Festival (UK), Hampden-Sydney Chamber Music Festival, Kodály Institute, Perilous Night, Fringe, Spark Festival of Electronic Music, Seward Arts, Music 2000, CCM Village Opening, and Minnesota Composers Alliance. McCright completed his Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in Piano Performance from the University of Minnesota, under the tutelage of Lydia Artymiw. In addition to private study in New York City with Lisa Moore, he also holds degrees from the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati and Westminster College. [www.matthewmccright.org](http://www.matthewmccright.org)

**JEFFERSON CAMPBELL**, Associate Professor and Music Department Head at the University of Minnesota Duluth, has extensive experiences as a chamber musician and soloist throughout the United States and abroad. Holding a doctorate in bassoon performance from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, he has appeared with chamber ensembles across the country as well as Germany, France and China. He was the soloist on Rubin's innova CD, *Nostalgia*. Campbell has commissioned more than twenty new works from American composers.

**ALEXANDER CHERNYSHEV** earned his doctorate and masters degrees with honors in piano and chamber music from the St. Petersburg Conservatory. He taught piano and chamber music for eighteen years at the St. Petersburg Conservatory branch in Petrozavodsk. He was a founder and leader of the internationally-acclaimed trio Classic Retro. Dr. Chernyshev joined the music faculty of the University of Minnesota Duluth in 1993.

**BETSY HUSBY**, Assistant Professor of Cello at the University of Minnesota Duluth, earned her DMA, MM, and BA degrees from the State University of New York at Stony Brook where she studied with Bernard Greenhouse. She has been principal cello with the Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra for nearly three decades and has performed internationally as a duo with UMD colleague Alexander Chernyshev.

Percussionist **GENE KOSHINSKI** has delighted audiences worldwide with his dynamic performances and creative programming. He is Assistant Professor of Percussion at the University of Minnesota Duluth and is a founding member of the Quey Percussion Duo. Also an accomplished composer he was the recipient of the 32nd Annual ASCAP Foundation Nissim Prize.

**TRACY LIPKE-PERRY** enjoys a variety of teaching and performance opportunities as a collaborative artist, vocal coach, and solo pianist. She holds a DMA in piano performance with a minor in neurophysiology from the University of Arizona, an MM from the University of Utah, and a BM degree in both piano performance and mathematics from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. She is currently Assistant Professor of Piano at the University of Minnesota Duluth.

Distinguished flutist **LORIE SCOTT** holds DMA and MM degrees from the University of North Texas and a BA from Luther College, summa cum laude. She was recently named to the Fulbright Specialist Roster in American Studies for music. Dr. Scott's edition of the Karg-Elert *Caprices* (Urmusik Edition) was a winner of the National Flute Association's Newly Published Music Competition and was listed as 'Editor's Choice' in Flute Talk Magazine.

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Photo of Justin Rubin by David Pangborn.  
Photo of Matthew McCright by Justin Thai.  
Paintings by Justin Rubin.

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