

ROBERT PATERSON

*The  
Four Seasons*



AMERICAN MODERN ENSEMBLE

MARNIE BRECKENRIDGE  
Soprano

BLYTHE GAISSERT  
Mezzo-Soprano

ALOK KUMAR  
Tenor

DAVID NEAL  
Bass-Baritone



## Story Behind *The Four Seasons*

I am certainly not the first composer to create a work based on the seasons! There is, of course, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, but also Glazunov's ballet *The Seasons*, Haydn's oratorio of the same name, Schubert's *Winterreise*, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Mahler's *Solitary in Autumn* from *The Song of the Earth*... the list is seemingly endless. Nonetheless, I wanted to create a new work of my own that I hope is deeply personal and heartfelt, using the seasons as inspiration.

*The Four Seasons* began twenty years ago with a single movement, the first movement of *Winter Songs*, which was initially a stand-alone song. At first, I thought I would just compose a single set of poems based on a single season, but then I became obsessed with the idea of creating four cycles, each for a different voice type and season, to create a full evening's worth of songs. From the beginning, I knew I wanted to create two versions of each cycle: one for a Pierrot ensemble (voice, flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano and percussion, inspired by the instrumentation of Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*) and an alternate version for voice and piano.

Since the premiere of Schoenberg's work, Pierrot ensembles have become a default instrumental combination for new chamber music; an orchestra in microcosm, with strings, winds, and percussion, that affords a lot of timbral color with an easily obtainable number of instruments. Numerous excellent composers have composed works for this grouping, and there are many professional performing ensembles based on this instrumentation.

The piano/vocal versions of these works are meant to stand on their own as separate, though related, compositions. They are not just straight transcriptions of the chamber versions. In fact, there are details in the piano/vocal versions that are noticeably different. The only cycle that started out as a chamber version first was *Winter Songs*; the other three cycles all began as piano/vocal versions.

Something that evolved naturally between all of the cycles was how I approached percussion. Being a percussionist, I am keenly aware of how much work it is to move percussion equipment, and how much renting percussion instruments costs, so I made sure to keep the percussion set-up economical. I chose vibraphone as the main instrument (which is also much easier to fit in a car than a marimba!), and then added metallic sounds such as suspended cymbal, three triangles, glockenspiel (orchestra bells), tam-tam, and so on. I decided to use this basic percussion set-up for all four cycles.

As an aside, I never envisioned that I would compose so many Pierrot pieces. To date, at least according to Wikipedia, I have composed more pieces for this type of ensemble than anyone in the world. I certainly never set out to do that as part of some sort of master plan; I think it was really just an accident. If I had been given a choice, I might have composed these works for orchestra, but I didn't have access to orchestras when I began *Winter Songs*, the first work in this set.

For a variety of reasons, universities are often hesitant to let composers write significant pieces for their own orchestras. Pierrot ensembles are often used as a kind of miniature orchestra, so composers can experience composing a piece for a variety of instruments without needing the orchestra to perform a piece that may not be good, or, as is often the case, take the spot of a classic work that the conductor wants to perform with the students. Fortunately, at this point in my career, I am receiving quite a few orchestral commissions and performances, so perhaps writing so many Pierrot pieces helped me in this respect.

I wrote my first Pierrot piece, *Sextet*, for the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble and won an ASCAP award for that, and then received other opportunities to write works with similar instrumentation. As I went on, I became comfortable with the idea of composing for this ensemble, and after receiving so many performances of my *Sextet* and other similar works I befriended lots of Pierrot ensembles, and other ensembles with similar instrumentation.

Regarding the timing of the release of this album, I think part of the reason it is being released now is because it was aligned with a world premiere concert at Carnegie Hall in honor of my 50th birthday, and it also took time to find appropriate texts and then compose all twenty-one songs. While researching what to set, I read an enormous amount of poetry dedicated to the seasons, along with poetry by poets such as May Sarton or Richard Wilbur who focus on nature or the seasons. Sometimes it takes up to a year or even longer to obtain rights to set poems, so that can cause delays as well.

It also takes time to find ensembles or organizations that will commission new works, and also to find the right singers to premiere and perform the works. However, probably the single biggest reason this took a while is because I prefer to take breaks between pieces of the same or similar instrumentation by composing pieces that are completely different; it's nice to come back to writing for an ensemble with a fresh perspective. Having said that, I definitely use many of the same techniques between all four pieces, since I wanted the entire set to sound unified.

With all of this in mind, I hope that my music, coupled with the myriad of wonderful poems I am honored to have had the opportunity to set, offers a unique perspective on the seasons and that listeners will enjoy this album.

— Robert Paterson

## Disc 1

### *Summer Songs*

1. I. Summer Music (May Sarton) 3'58"
2. II. The Kite (Anne Sexton) 4'56"
3. III. Childhood (Sharan Strange) 4'44"
4. IV. Moths (Jennifer O'Grady) 4'39"
5. V. Summer Night, Riverside (Sara Teasdale) 5'19"

### *Autumn Songs*

6. I. Ascension: Autumn Dusk in Central Park (Evelyn Scott) 4'16"
7. II. Under The Harvest Moon (Carl Sandburg) 3'25"
8. III. All Hallows' Eve (Dorothea Tanning) 2'10"
9. IV. November for Beginners (Rita Dove) 4'45"
10. V. Leaves Before The Wind (May Sarton) 4'33"

## Disc 2

### *Winter Songs*

1. I. Icicles filled the long window (Wallace Stevens) 2'37"
2. II. Dark Day, Warm and Windy (A. R. Ammons) 3'22"
3. III. The Snow Man (Wallace Stevens) 4'11"
4. IV. Boy at The Window (Richard Wilbur) 4'07"
5. V. Old Story (Robert Creeley) 2'56"
6. VI. Neither Snow (Billy Collins) 3'28"

### *Spring Songs*

7. I. English Sparrows (Washington Square) (Edna St. Vincent Millay) 3'32"
8. II. April 5, 1974 (Richard Wilbur) 3'24"
9. III. Done With (Ann Stanford) 5'20"
10. IV. The Widow's Lament in Springtime (William Carlos Williams) 4'54"
11. V. Spring Rain (Sara Teasdale) 3'30"

TOTAL TIME: 84'18"

## ***Summer Songs***

*Robert Paterson, conductor; Marnie Breckenridge, soprano; Sato Moughalian, flute; Pascal Archer, clarinet; Matthew Ward, percussion; Geoffrey Bursleson, piano; Esther Noh, violin Dave Eggar, cello*

There is a seemingly endless supply of poems about summer. After writing for bass-baritone, I realized that I had inadvertently only set poems by male poets, so I decided to restrict myself to female poets for this cycle as a way to create a balance between these two works.

*Summer Songs* begins with a setting of *Summer Music* by May Sarton, a light, happy, playfully musical poem filled with allusions to nature. The second movement is a setting of *The Kite* by Anne Sexton, a poem about honoring and enjoying the moment and the simple things in life, such as flying kites with children. *Childhood*, the third movement, is a setting of a poem by Sharan Strange about children capturing fireflies. The fourth movement, *Moths*, is a setting of a poem by Jennifer O'Grady about moths, but relating to late night conversation on a front porch. The cycle ends with a setting of *Summer Night, Riverside*, by Sara Teasdale, a passionate, warm, optimistic poem that muses on the timelessness of summer.

*Summer Songs* was commissioned by The ASCAP Foundation Charles Kingsford Fund, for Marnie Breckenridge and the American Modern Ensemble. Special thanks to Marnie for her assistance in selecting the poems for this cycle.

## **I. Summer Music**

Summer is all a green air—  
From the brilliant lawn, sopranos  
Through murmuring hedges  
Accompanied by some poplars;  
In fields of wheat, surprises;  
Through faraway pastures, flows  
To the horizon's blues  
In slow decrescendos.

Summer is all a green sound—  
Rippling in the foreground  
To that soft applause,  
The foam of Queen Anne's lace.  
Green, green in the ear  
Is all we care to hear—  
Until a field suddenly flashes  
The singing with so sharp  
A yellow that it crashes  
Loud cymbals in the ear,  
Minor has turned to major  
As summer, lulling and so mild,  
Goes golden-buttercup-wild.

— May Sarton

*Summer Music* by May Sarton, from *Collected poems: 1930-1993*.  
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Lippincott Massie McQuilkin.



## II. The Kite

Here, in front of the summer hotel  
the beach waits like an altar.  
We are lying on a cloth of sand  
while the Atlantic noon stains  
the world in light.  
It was much the same  
five years ago. I remember  
how Ezio Pinza was flying a kite  
for the children. None of us noticed  
it then. The pleated lady  
was still a nest of her knitting.  
Four pouchy fellows kept their policy  
of gin and tonic while trading some money.  
The parasol girls slept, sun-sitting  
their lovely years. No one thought  
how precious it was, or even how funny  
the festival seemed, square rigged in the air.  
The air was a season they had bought,  
like the cloth of sand.  
I've been waiting  
on this private stretch of summer land,  
counting these five years and wondering why.  
I mean, it was different that time  
with Ezio Pinza flying a kite.  
Maybe, after all, he knew something more  
and was right.

— Anne Sexton

*The Kite* by Anne Sexton, from *The Complete poems*,  
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Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc.

## III. Childhood

Summer brought fireflies in swarms.  
They lit our evenings like dreams  
we thought we couldn't have.  
We caught them in jars, punched  
holes, carried them around for days.

Luminous abdomens that when charged  
with air turn bright. Imagine!  
mere insects carrying such cargo,  
magical caravans flickering beneath  
low July skies. We chased them, amazed.

The idea! Those tiny bodies  
pulsing phosphorescence.  
They made reckless traffic,  
signaling, neon flashes forever  
into the deepening dusk.

They gave us new faith  
in the nasty tonics of childhood—  
pungent, murky liquids promising  
shining eyes, strong teeth, glowing skin—  
and we silently vowed to swallow ever after.

What was the secret of light?  
We wanted their brilliance—  
small fires hovering,  
each tiny explosion  
the birth of a new world.

— Sharan Strange

*Childhood* by Sharan Strange, from *Ash*, © Beacon Press, 2001.  
Reprinted with permission from Sharan Strange.

#### IV. Moths

Adrift in the liberating, late light  
of August, delicate, frivolous,  
they make their way to my front porch  
and flutter near the glassed-in bulb,  
translucent as a thought suddenly  
wondered aloud, illuminating the air  
that's thick with honeysuckle and dusk.  
You and I are doing our best  
at conversation, keeping it light, steering clear  
of what we'd like to say.  
You leave, and the night becomes  
cluttered with moths, some tattered,  
their dumbly curious filaments  
startling against my cheek. How quickly,  
instinctively, I brush them away.  
Dazed, they cling to the outer darkness  
like pale reminders of ourselves.  
Others seem to want so desperately  
to get inside. Months later, I'll find  
the woolens, snug in their resting places,  
full of missing pieces.

– Jennifer O'Grady

*Moths* by Jennifer O'Grady, from *White*. © Mid-list Press, 1999.  
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#### V. Summer Night, Riverside

In the wild soft summer darkness  
How many and many a night we two together  
Sat in the park and watched the Hudson  
Wearing her lights like golden spangles  
Glinting on black satin.  
The rail along the curving pathway  
Was low in a happy place to let us cross,  
And down the hill a tree that dripped with bloom  
Sheltered us,  
While your kisses and the flowers,  
Falling, falling,  
Tangled in my hair...  
The frail white stars moved slowly over the sky.  
And now, far off  
In the fragrant darkness  
The tree is tremulous again with bloom  
For June comes back.  
To-night what girl  
Dreamily before her mirror shakes from her hair  
This year's blossoms, clinging to its coils?

– Sara Teasdale

Poem in the public domain.



## ***Autumn Songs***

*Robert Paterson, conductor; Blythe Gaissert, mezzo-soprano; Sato Moughalian, flute; Pascal Archer, clarinet; Matthew Ward, percussion; Geoffrey Burleson, piano; Esther Noh, violin; Dave Eggar, cello*

*Autumn Songs* for mezzo-soprano is my final song cycle celebrating the seasons. As with my previous three cycles, this cycle contains settings of poems by various American poets.

Like *Spring Songs*, *Autumn Songs* begins with New York: a setting of Evelyn Scott's *Ascension: Autumn Dusk in Central Park*, an early 20th century Imagist poem in which people seem to merge at dusk. The second movement is a setting of *Under the Harvest Moon* by Carl Sandburg. In this poem, Sandburg uses autumn and summer as a metaphor for people in two different periods of life, revealing beauty in both stages. Memory is the primary concern for someone who is older, and possibility for someone who is younger. The third movement is a setting of *All Hallows' Eve* by Dorothea Tanning, who was not only a poet, but also a well-known visual artist whose early work was inspired by Surrealism. This is perhaps the most playful setting, and I used Tanning's evocative, Surrealistic imagery as inspiration for colorful sounds and angular dissonances in the ensemble. *November for Beginners* by Rita Dove is the text for the fourth movement. In this setting, Dove beautifully encapsulates the feeling of waiting for winter in November, and the sense of anticipation one feels during the fall months. At the end of her poem, she uses the sound of zithers as a metaphor for the sounds of wind and rain when spring comes. The final movement, a setting of *Leaves Before The Wind* by May Sarton, is inspired by Irish jigs, and mimics leaves blowing in the wind. The penultimate section is anthemic, and the end of the movement is more calm and similar to the beginning.

*Autumn Songs* was made possible, in part, by generous support from the Gerson Family Foundation.

## **I. Ascension: Autumn Dusk in Central Park**

Featureless people glide with dim motion through a quivering blue silver;  
Boats merge with the bronze-gold welters about their keels.  
The trees float upward in gray and green flames.  
Clouds, swans, boats, trees, all gliding up a hillside  
After some gray old women who lift their gaunt forms  
From falling shrouds of leaves.

Thin fingered twigs clutch darkly at nothing.  
Crackling skeletons shine.  
Along the smutted horizon of Fifth Avenue  
The hooded houses watch heavily  
With oily gold eyes.

— Evelyn Scott

In the public domain. From *Precipitations, 1920, Manhattan, The Unpeopled City*.



## II. Under the Harvest Moon

Under the harvest moon,  
When the soft silver  
Drips shimmering  
Over the garden nights,  
Death, the gray mocker,  
Comes and whispers to you  
As a beautiful friend  
Who remembers.

Under the summer roses  
When the flagrant crimson  
Lurks in the dusk  
Of the wild red leaves,  
Love, with little hands,  
Comes and touches you  
With a thousand memories,  
And asks you  
Beautiful, unanswerable questions.

— Carl Sandburg

In the public domain.

## III. All Hallows' Eve

Be perfect, make it otherwise.  
Yesterday is torn in shreds.  
Lightning's thousand sulfur eyes  
Rip apart the breathing beds.  
Hear bones crack and pulverize.  
Doom creeps in on rubber treads.  
Countless overwrought housewives,  
Minds unraveling like threads,  
Try lipstick shades to tranquilize  
Fears of age and general dreads.  
Sit tight, be perfect, swat the spies,  
Don't take faucets for fountainheads.  
Drink tasty antidotes. Otherwise  
You and the werewolf: newlyweds.

— Dorothea Tanning

*All Hallows' Eve* by Dorothea Tanning, from *Coming to That*:  
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#### IV. November for Beginners

Snow would be the easy  
way out—that softening  
sky like a sigh of relief  
at finally being allowed  
to yield. No dice.

We stack twigs for burning  
in glistening patches  
but the rain won't give.

So we wait, breeding  
mood, making music  
of decline. We sit down  
in the smell of the past  
and rise in a light  
that is already leaving.  
We ache in secret,  
memorizing

a gloomy line  
or two of German.  
When spring comes  
we promise to act  
the fool. Pour,  
rain! Sail, wind,  
with your cargo of zithers!

*November 1981*

— Rita Dove

*November for Beginners*, from *Collected Poems 1974-2004*  
by Rita Dove, W.W. Norton & Co., New York 2016.  
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#### V. Leaves Before The Wind

We have walked, looked at the actual trees:  
The chestnut leaves wide-open like a hand,  
The beech leaves bronzing under every breeze,  
We have felt flowing through our knees  
As if we were the wind.

We have sat silent when two horses came,  
Jangling their harness, to mow the long grass.  
We have sat long and never found a name  
For this suspension in the heart of flame  
That does not pass.

We have said nothing; we have parted often,  
Not looking back, as if departure took  
An absolute of will—once not again  
(But this is each day's feat, as when  
The heart first shook).

Where fervor opens every instant so,  
There is no instant that is not a curve,  
And we are always coming as we go;  
We lean toward the meeting that will show  
Love's very nerve.

And so exposed (O leaves before the wind!)  
We bear this flowing fire, forever free,  
And learn through devious paths to find  
The whole, the center, and perhaps unbind  
The mystery

Where there are no roots, only fervent leaves,  
Nourished on meditations and the air,  
Where all that comes is also all that leaves,  
And every hope compassionately lives  
Close to despair.

— May Sarton

*Leaves before the Wind* by May Sarton, from  
*Collected poems: 1930-1993*. © W.W. Norton & Company, 1993.  
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## ***Winter Songs***

*Robert Paterson, conductor; David Neal, bass-baritone; Sato Moughalian, flute; Benjamin Fingland, clarinet; Matthew Ward, percussion; Blair McMillen, piano; Robin Zeh, violin; Robert Burkhart, cello*

The idea for *Winter Songs* occurred to me after I wrote a short song based on the sixth poem from *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* by Wallace Stevens for a group composition project initiated by Steven Stucky at Cornell University. The original idea was to have each student in the department set a different poem in this work, culminating in an evening long song cycle. There are many compelling settings of *Thirteen Ways*, so instead of trying to contribute yet another, I decided to compose a song cycle using winter-themed poems by a variety of poets. David Neal, the bass-baritone who sang my initial song, *Icicles Filled the Long Window*, liked the idea so much that he asked me for a complete cycle. I spent months collecting and reading as many poems about winter as I could find. Winter-themed poems seem to fall into two distinct categories: those that are playful and fun, and those that are quite serious. I chose to set six serious poems, including another one by Wallace Stevens, and one each by Robert Creeley, Richard Wilbur, A. R. Ammons and Billy Collins.

As I studied the poems, I tried finding ways of connecting them, either by subject or theme—all poems about snow and ice or death and loss, for example—or by something frivolous, such as poets who wrote about winter with the first name of Robert: Frost, Pack, Bly, Creeley and Hayden. I also considered interspersing funny poems in-between serious ones, but that seemed to break the flow. Ultimately, I decided to set poems by contemporary poets that resonated most strongly with me; emotional quality and listener comprehension—whether a poem would be understood when set to music—became more important to me than subject matter. By coincidence, these poems are all by poets having ties to the American Northeast.

Perhaps my growing up in snowy Buffalo, New York made me feel these particular poems more than the others I read.

The poems are also meaningful to me on a personal level. The first one, *Icicles Filled the Long Window* by Wallace Stevens, is the poem that initiated this commission. The second, *Dark Day, Warm and Windy* by A. R. Ammons, reminds me of the walks I took while a doctoral student at Cornell. Although I never met Ammons while at Cornell, I like to think that we shared the experience of taking similar walks in and around Ithaca. I included the third poem, *The Snow Man* by Wallace Stevens, because I feel that since the first poem is quite short and Stevens wrote so many wonderful poems about winter, it seemed right to include another. The fourth poem, *Boy at The Window* by Richard Wilbur, is dedicated to my son Dylan who was two years old when I wrote this movement. It seems to perfectly capture the all-encompassing fear of pain and loss that every child goes through at a young age. (The entire cycle is also split in half with two poems about "snow men".) The fifth poem, *Old Story* by Robert Creeley, is special to me because I grew up in Buffalo, NY, and Creeley taught for a while at the State University of New York at Buffalo, the same school where my father taught for over thirty years. The last poem, *Neither Snow* by Billy Collins, was originally published in *The Cortland Review*, an online literary audio magazine located in the same town where *Winter Songs* was premiered. Collins describes a cab ride down the Avenue of the Americas during a snowstorm. I have lived in New York City for over twenty years, and I know first-hand what that feels like. Since this poem has ties to Cortland and New York, and since it is also the fastest movement, and since Billy Collins himself gave me permission to set it, it seemed like a good idea to end with this one.

*Winter Songs* was commissioned by David Neal and The Arts at Grace through the New York State Music Fund.



## I. Icicles filled the long window

from *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*

### VI

Icicles filled the long window  
With barbaric glass  
The shadow of the blackbird  
Crossed it, to and fro.  
The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.

– Wallace Stevens

*Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*, from *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* by Wallace Stevens, © 1954 by Wallace Stevens and renewed 1982 by Holly Stevens. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.



## II. Dark Day, Warm and Windy

Dark day, warm and windy,  
light breaking through  
clouds  
coloring the sides of tall  
furrows, thaw decaying  
snow, the wind stirring  
time up to a rush, I come home  
from work midmorning  
dark with contemplations,  
that the infant finds  
his hand unopened  
and the old man forgets  
his has closed—that rondure:  
I sit down at the piano  
and try the “Fuga I” in *The  
Well-Tempered Clavier* and  
my feelings lighten,  
the melody so incredible,  
the counter-melody incredible,  
the workings in and out  
precise and necessary

– A. R. Ammons

From *The Snow Poems* by A. R. Ammons. © 1977 A. R. Ammons.  
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### III. The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

— Wallace Stevens

*The Snow Man*, from *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*  
by Wallace Stevens, © 1954 by Wallace Stevens and renewed 1982  
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of Random House, Inc.

### IV. Boy at the Window

Seeing the snowman standing all alone  
In dusk and cold is more than he can bear.  
The small boy weeps to hear the wind prepare  
A night of gnashings and enormous moan.  
His tearful sight can hardly reach to where  
The pale-faced figure with bitumen eyes  
Returns him such a god-forsaken stare  
As outcast Adam gave to Paradise.

The man of snow is, nonetheless, content,  
Having no wish to go inside and die.  
Still, he is moved to see the youngster cry.  
Though frozen water is his element,  
He melts enough to drop from one soft eye  
A trickle of the purest rain, a tear  
For the child at the bright pane surrounded by  
Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear.

— Richard Wilbur

*Boy at the Window* from *Things of This World*, © 1952  
and renewed 1980 by Richard Wilbur, reproduced by  
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## V. Old Story

Like kid on float  
of ice block sinking  
in pond the field had made  
from winter's melting snow

so wisdom accumulated  
to disintegrate  
in conduits of brain  
in neural circuits faded

while gloomy muscles shrank  
mind padded the paths  
its thought had wrought  
its habits had created

till like kid afloat  
on ice block broken  
on or inside the thing it stood  
or was forsaken.

– Robert Creeley

From *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1975-2005*,  
by Robert Creeley, © 2006 The Estate of Robert Creeley.  
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## VI. Neither Snow

When all of a sudden the city air filled with snow,  
the distinguishable flakes  
blowing sideways,  
looked like krill  
fleeing the maw of an advancing whale.

At least they looked that way to me  
from the taxi window,  
and since I happened to be sitting  
that fading Sunday afternoon  
in the very center of the universe,  
who was in a better position  
to say what looked like what,  
which thing resembled some other?

Yes, it was a run of white plankton  
borne down the Avenue of the Americas  
in the stream of the wind,  
phosphorescent against the weighty buildings.

Which made the taxi itself,  
yellow and slow-moving,  
a kind of undersea creature,  
I thought as I wiped the fog from the glass,

and me one of its protruding eyes,  
an eye on a stem  
swiveling this way and that  
monitoring one side of its world,  
observing tons of water  
tons of people  
colored signs and lights  
and now a wildly blowing race of snow.

– Billy Collins

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## ***Spring Songs***

*Robert Paterson, conductor; Alok Kumar, tenor; Grace Law, flute; Nuno Antunes, clarinet; Samuel Z. Solomon, percussion; Geoffrey Burleson, piano; Victoria Paterson, violin; Peter Sachon, cello*

*Spring Songs* is my third song cycle celebrating the seasons. As with the other three cycles, this cycle contains settings of poems by various American poets..

Whereas both *Winter Songs* and *Summer Songs* end with scenes in New York City, *Spring Songs* begins with New York: a setting of *English Sparrows (Washington Square)* by Edna St. Vincent Millay, a poem about a scene that takes place in the morning in Greenwich Village, a neighborhood in New York City where Millay lived in the early 1900s. The second movement is a setting of *April 5, 1974* by Richard Wilbur, a poem Wilbur wrote in honor of Robert Frost's one-hundredth birthday, and I interpret as being about overcoming self-doubt through wisdom, and about understanding the change of seasons, but also a change of mind. The third movement, *Done With* by Ann Stanford, I interpret to be about death and rebirth. Stanford symbolizes this by a house being torn down and the ground paved over, the now suffocated plant life yearning to break through. *The Widow's Lament in Springtime*, the fourth movement, is a setting of a poem by William Carlos Williams. I interpret this poem as a modernist, pastoral elegy that uses images of nature to lament the death of a loved one. The final movement, a setting of the poem *Spring Rain* by Sara Teasdale, is about a happy memory of a lover brought about by an evening thunderstorm.

*Spring Songs* was commissioned by Rick Teller and Kathleen Rogers for the American Modern Ensemble.

## **I. English Sparrows (Washington Square)**

How sweet the sound in the city an hour before sunrise,  
When the park is empty and grey and the light clear and  
so lovely

I must sit on the floor before my open window for an  
hour with my arms on the sill

And my cheek on my arm, watching the spring sky's  
Soft suffusion from the roofed horizon upward with  
palest rose,

Doting on the charming sight with eyes

Open, eyes closed;

Breathing with quiet pleasure the cool air cleansed by  
the night, lacking all will

To let such happiness go, nor thinking the least thing ill  
In me for such indulgence, pleased with the day and with  
myself.

How sweet

The noisy chirping of the urchin sparrows from crevice  
and shelf

Under my window, and from down there in the street,  
Announcing the advance of the roaring competitive day  
with city bird-song.

— Edna St. Vincent Millay

*English Sparrows (Washington Square)* © 1939 and renewed  
© 1967 by Edna St. Vincent Millay and Norma Millay Ellis.  
Text used by permission of Holly Peppe, Literary Executor,  
The Edna St. Vincent Millay Society.



## II. April 5, 1974

The air was soft, the ground still cold.  
In wet dull pastures where I strolled  
Was something I could not believe.  
Dead grass appeared to slide and heave,  
Though still too frozen-flat to stir,  
And rocks to twitch, and all to blur.  
What was this rippling of the land?  
Was matter getting out of hand  
And making free with natural law?  
I stopped and blinked, and then I saw  
A fact as eerie as a dream.  
There was a subtle flood of stream  
Moving upon the face of things.  
It came from standing pools and springs  
And what of snow was still around;  
It came of winter's giving ground  
So that the freeze was coming out,  
As when a set mind, blessed by doubt,  
Relaxes into mother-wit.  
Flowers, I said, will come of it.

— Richard Wilbur

*April 5, 1974* from *Richard Wilbur, Collected Poems, 1943-2004*,  
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Houghton Mifflin Publishing Company.



## III. Done With

My house is torn down —  
Plaster sifting, the pillars broken,  
Beams jagged, the wall crushed by the bulldozer.  
The whole roof has fallen  
On the hall and the kitchen  
The bedrooms, the parlor.

They are trampling the garden—  
My mother's lilac, my father's grapevine,  
The freesias, the jonquils, the grasses.  
Hot asphalt goes down  
Over the torn stems, and hardens.

What will they do in springtime  
Those bulbs and stems groping upward  
That drown in earth under the paving,  
Thick with sap, pale in the dark  
As they try the unrolling of green.

May they double themselves  
Pushing together up to the sunlight,  
May they break through the seal stretched above them  
Open and flower and cry we are living.

— Ann Stanford

*Done With* from *Holding Our Own: The Selected Poems of Ann Stanford*,  
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Penguin Random House.

#### IV. The Widow's Lament in Springtime

Sorrow is my own yard  
where the new grass  
flames as it has flamed  
often before, but not  
with the cold fire  
that closes round me this year.  
Thirty-five years  
I lived with my husband.  
The plum tree is white today  
with masses of flowers.  
Masses of flowers  
load the cherry branches  
and color some bushes  
yellow and some red,  
but the grief in my heart  
is stronger than they,  
for though they were my joy  
formerly, today I notice them  
and turn away forgetting.  
Today my son told me  
that in the meadows,  
at the edge of the heavy woods  
in the distance, he saw  
trees of white flowers.  
I feel that I would like  
to go there  
and fall into those flowers  
and sink into the marsh near them.

– William Carlos Williams

This poem is in the public domain.

#### V. Spring Rain

I thought I had forgotten,  
But it all came back again  
To-night with the first spring thunder  
In a rush of rain.

I remembered a darkened doorway  
Where we stood while the storm swept by,  
Thunder gripping the earth  
And lightning scrawled on the sky.

The passing motor busses swayed,  
For the street was a river of rain,  
Lashed into little golden waves  
In the lamp light's stain.

With the wild spring rain and thunder  
My heart was wild and gay;  
Your eyes said more to me that night  
Than your lips would ever say. . . .

I thought I had forgotten,  
But it all came back again  
To-night with the first spring thunder  
In a rush of rain.

– Sara Teasdale

This poem is in the public domain.



Described by the press as “a modern day master” (*AXS.com*) and the “highlight of the program” (*The New York Times*), **Robert Paterson** has won awards for his music in virtually every classical genre. The Classical Recording Foundation at Carnegie’s Weill Hall named



Paterson *Composer of The Year* in 2011. His works have appeared on National Public Radio’s *Best of the Year* lists for classical music and regularly appear on radio playlists across the United States.

Paterson’s music has been performed by hundreds of outstanding ensembles, including Nashville Opera, Vermont Symphony Orchestra, Delaware Symphony, Austin Symphony, Louisville Orchestra, Buffalo Philharmonic, Oratorio Society of New York, Musica Sacra, Chamber Choir of Europe, Atlanta Master Chorale, New York New Music Ensemble, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, American Modern Ensemble, BargeMusic, Imani Winds, Euclid Quartet, Indianapolis Quartet, and Paris-based Ensemble Aleph.

Recent commissions include *Ghost Theater*, for the Albany Symphony, *Shine* for the American Brass Quintet, *Moon Trio* for the Claremont Trio and new works commissioned by the Vermont Symphony Orchestra, Gulf Coast Symphony, and numerous choirs, including the Ember Choral Ensemble and The Esoterics. Paterson’s debut choral album, *Eternal Reflections*, was released by Musica Sacra and Maestro Kent Tritle in 2015.

Paterson has received awards for his works in virtually every classical genre, including a three-year *Music Alive* grant from the League of American Orchestras and New Music USA, the

American Composers Forum Jerome Composers Commissioning Program, the Utah Arts Festival Commission Competition, Cincinnati Camerata Composition Competition, and fellowships to Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony, Aspen Music Festival, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and the Copland House.

In 2018, Paterson founded the Mostly Modern Festival (MMF), an annual, three-week summer music festival that highlights contemporary music, which takes place at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY. In 2005, Paterson founded the New York City-based American Modern Ensemble (AME), which celebrates contemporary music via lively thematic programming. He serves as artistic director for both MMF and AME as well as house composer, frequently contributing new pieces for the festival and ensemble. In 2005, he also founded American Modern Recordings (AMR), an affiliated record label that is distributed by NAXOS. Paterson’s recordings are also featured on the Capstone, Centaur, Summit, and RiAx labels.

Born in 1970, Paterson was raised in Buffalo, New York, the son of a sculptor and a painter. Although his first love was percussion, he soon discovered a passion for composition, writing his first piece at age thirteen. In the late 1980s, Paterson pioneered the development of a six-mallet marimba technique, and he has written numerous pieces utilizing this technique. He released the first-ever album of six-mallet music, *Six Mallet Marimba* in 2012 (AMR) to a sold-out crowd at the Rubin Museum in Chelsea, NYC.

Paterson holds degrees from the Eastman School of Music (BM), Indiana University (MM), and Cornell University (DMA). Paterson gives master classes at numerous colleges and universities, most recently at the Curtis Institute of Music, Aspen Music School & Festival, the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, New York University, and the Cleveland Institute of Music. He resides in New York City and Saratoga Springs, New York with his wife, Victoria, and son, Dylan.

For more information, visit [robertpaterson.com](http://robertpaterson.com).

American soprano **Marnie Breckenridge** has won acclaim internationally in a vast repertoire spanning from the Baroque to the Modern. She is continuously praised for her grounded storytelling and known for her deeply expressive score interpretations, layered characterizations, and her beautiful pure soprano. A favorite among some of the most gifted composers of our time, her excellent musicianship and technique have established her as a go-to performer of critically acclaimed new works with her “lovely soprano” voice (*The New York Times*), “lyrical poignancy and dramatic power” (*The Chicago Tribune*) and singing as “resplendent as always” (*The San Francisco Chronicle*).



Marnie’s passionate interpretations of contemporary works include: Mother in *Dog Days* by David T. Little with Los Angeles Opera, The Prototype Festival in NYC and at Fort Worth Opera with its premiere at Montclair Peak Performances (voted Best Opera 2012 by TimeOut Magazine), Sierva Maria in Peter Eötvös’s *Love And Other Demons* at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, La Princesse in Philip Glass’ *Orphée*, the title role in Milhaud’s *Médée*, Margarita Xirgu in Golijov’s *Ainadamar*, and Beck Strand in Kaminsky’s *Today It Rains* with Opera Parallèle, a Washington National Chorus debut as Ruth in Luna Pearl Woolf’s *The Pillar*, her Berkeley Symphony debut in Chin’s *Cantanrix Sopranica* with Kent Nagano, her Ravinia Festival debut in Jake Heggie’s *To Hell And Back* with Philharmonia

Baroque, co-starring Patti LuPone and Cunegonde in Robert Carson’s *Candide* with English National Opera, Prague State Opera and on tour in Japan deemed “simply terrific” (*Opera Magazine UK*) and “note perfect” (*Prague Post*).

Recent favorite concert work includes Barber’s *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* and roles in *L’enfant Et Les Sortilèges* with the San Francisco Symphony, *In Real Life* and *Summer Songs* by Robert Paterson at Weil Hall/Carnegie Hall with American Modern Ensemble, *Teach Your Children* by David Lang, *Ein Deutsches Requiem* and *Carmina Burana* with the SF Choral Society at Davies Symphony Hall, Canteloube’s *Chants D’auvergne* with Brooklyn Art Song Society, Barber’s *Knoxville: Summer Of 1915* and Mahler’s *4<sup>th</sup> symphony* with Napa Symphony and Pacific Symphony as well as the *Bachianas Brasileiras* and *Chicago Songs* (written for her by Kurt Erickson) with the Sacramento Philharmonic.

For more information, visit [marniebreckenridge.com](http://marniebreckenridge.com).



Mezzo-soprano

**Blythe Gaissert** has established herself as one of the preeminent interpreters of some of the brightest stars of new classical music.

A true singing actress, she has received critical acclaim for her interpretations of both new and traditional repertoire in opera, concert, and chamber repertoire. "Gaissert gave a dramatically powerful, vocally stunning portrait of a woman growing increasingly desperate and delusional from lack of contact with the outer world. Gaissert's development of Loats's personality was utterly believable, and she gave a virtuoso performance of this very challenging music" (Arlo McKinnon, Opera News for *The Echo Drift*). Gaissert is known for her warm tone, powerful stage presence, impeccable musicianship, and technical prowess.

In the 2019-20 season, Ms. Gaissert created the role of Dorothy in the world premiere of Kamala Sankaram and Rob Handel's *Looking At You* with Here Arts Center NYC. She also sang Gertrude Stein in Ricky Ian Gordon and Royce Vavrek's *27* with Intermountain Opera Bozeman, Hannah After in *As One* with Opera Columbus and Opera Memphis, and covered Margret in *Wozzeck* at the Metropolitan Opera, sang Hansel in *Hansel And Gretel* at San Diego Opera, sang the world premiere of a chamber piece by John Glover and Kelly Rourke with Échappé Ensemble, sang *Beethoven 9* with the Fort Worth Symphony, gave the world premiere of Robert Paterson's *Autumn Songs* with American Modern Ensemble at Carnegie Hall and finished out the season with a recital of Brahms and Schubert with the Brooklyn Art Song Society.



In the 2018-19 season, Ms. Gaissert created the role of Georgia O'Keefe in *Today It Rains* with San Francisco's Opera Parallèle, the world premiere of the third opera by the highly acclaimed and record-setting team of *As One*: Laura Kaminsky, Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed. She is also reprising her role as Hannah After in her 6th production of *As One* with New York City Opera/American Opera Projects, performed Beethoven's 9th Symphony with both the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and Sarasota Orchestra, and performed in a workshop performance of Laura Kaminsky's fourth opera, also with librettist Kimberly Reed, *Postville: Hometown To The World* with Opera Fusion: New Works in conjunction with Cincinnati Opera and her alma mater Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music. Recent engagements include Berio's *Folk Songs* and Siegrune in *Die Walküre* with the Dallas Symphony, and Berlioz's *L'Enfance Du Christ* with the Orquesta Sinfónica y Coro RTVE conducted by Miguel Harth-Bedoya.

Previous engagements include *Carmen*, *Die Fledermaus* (Orlovsky), *Hansel Und Gretel* (Gretel), *Die Walküre* (Siegrune), *Rape Of Lucretia* (Lucretia), *Rigoletto* (Maddalena), *Madama Butterfly* (Suzuki), and as soloist in the Verdi *Requiem*, Berio *Folk Songs*, and Mozart *Requiem*. Ms. Gaissert has given world premieres of works by John Adams, Laura Kaminsky, Mikael Karlsson, Robert Paterson, Martin Hennessy, Mohammed Fairouz, Richard Pearson Thomas, Glen Roven, Yotam Haber, Jorge Martin, Tom Cipullo, Renee Favand-See, Gilda Lyons, Jessica Meyer, Gabriel Kahane, and more. Companies with whom Ms. Gaissert has performed include the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Philharmonic, LA Opera, Dallas Symphony, San Diego Opera, Prototype Festival, Aldeburgh Festival, Lyrique en Mer, Tulsa Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Sarasota Opera, and Opera Saratoga.

For more information, visit [blythegaissert.com](http://blythegaissert.com).

Noted as a “tenor unlike others, with a resonance and depth to his voice,”

**Alok Kumar** is on the rise. This season he will return to The Metropolitan Opera in a variety of performances including the role of Italian Singer in *Der Rosenkavalier* and the Steuermann in *Der*



*Fliegende Holländer* as well as for their production of *Kat'a Kabanova*. He will also perform in the world première of Robert Paterson's Chamber Version of *Spring Songs* at Carnegie Hall, makes his Opera Omaha début in the role of Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, as well as return to the London Philharmonic for the revival of *Sukanya*.

Mr. Kumar recently made a series of important débuts starting with his Royal Opera House Covent Garden and London Philharmonic Orchestra début creating the role of Chyavana in the world premiere of Ravi Shankar's opera *Sukanya*, a work harmonizing the distinct music, dance and theatrical traditions of India and the West. His successful début with The Metropolitan Opera in Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* led to an immediate return as Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi*. He made his Los Angeles Opera début in productions of *La Traviata*, *Moses* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Additionally, Mr. Kumar participated in the *Intimate Apparel* workshop with Lincoln Center and appeared in Houston Grand Opera's HGOco serial web opera entitled *Star Cross'd* in the opera *A Rose*.

In recent seasons he performed Don José in Bizet's *Carmen* with Michigan Opera Theater, Florida Grand Opera and Musica Viva in Hong Kong, reprised the role of the Duke of Mantua in Palm Beach Opera's production of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, debuted as Macduff in Verdi's *Macbeth* under the baton of Emmanuel Plasson, sang and premiered Robert Paterson's *Batter's Box* and *Spring Songs*, respectively, with American Modern Ensemble at Carnegie Hall. International engagements include débuts at Canada's le Domaine Forget International Music Festival as Don José in *La tragedie de Carmen* and a concert of French operatic excerpts in France under the direction of Michel Plasson.

Recent concert engagements include Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* with the Fairfield County Chorale, as well as a series of summer concerts with the Bay Atlantic Symphony featuring Italian operatic repertoire. His symphonic and orchestral appearances include the Cincinnati Pops, Symphony Hall with the Boston Pops for the Richard Rodgers Centennial and in Sanders Theater with the Greater Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra, the Sanibel Music Festival in Florida, the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles in the title role in Galvany's *Oh My Son*, and Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium where he made his début as tenor soloist in the New York premiere of Stephen Paulus' *To Be Certain of the Dawn*.

For more information, visit [alokkumartenor.com](http://alokkumartenor.com).



Bass-baritone **David Neal** has performed a wide range of roles in opera, musical theatre, and concert with performances at Lake George Opera, Syracuse Opera, the Opera Company of Philadelphia, Baltimore Opera, Tri-Cities Opera, Lyric Opera Cleveland,



Symphony Space, the Cayuga Chamber Orchestra, Opera Ithaca, the Folger Theatre, the Kennedy Center Concert Hall, the Kitchen Theatre, and the Society for New Music. He made his first appearance in Carnegie Hall / Weill Recital Hall in April of 2018 in the world premiere of Robert Paterson's song cycle *Night Songs*. He commissioned and premiered Paterson's *Winter Songs* in 2008 with ensemble of the Society for New Music on The Arts at Grace concert series. He is the Founding Artistic Director of that series, which has presented over 75 professional concerts without charge to the community.

Other work in new music includes the world premiere of Lowell Liebermann's *Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening*, as well as numerous appearances with the Center for Contemporary Opera. With CCO, he created the role of The Commissioner in Michael Dellaira's *The Secret Agent*, with performances at the Kaye Playhouse, the National Hungarian Opera in Szeged, Hungary, and the Opera-Theatre of Avignon, France. He returned to Szeged in CCO's production of William Mayer's *A Death in the Family*. He has appeared with the American Modern Ensemble at the DiMenna Center, The TimesCenter, and Bargemusic.

Recent appearances include performances with Symphoria (*Messiah, Mass in B Minor*), the Cayuga Chamber Orchestra (*Messiah, Bach Magnificat, La Bohème*), the Narrator in Hugh McElyea's *Tenebrae: The Passion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, and the roles of Tonic in Steven Stucky's *The Classical Style* and Peccavit the Pedlar in Charles Fussell's *The Astronaut's Tale* with The Society for New Music. His recorded performances may be heard on the Albany and AMR labels.

For more information, visit [davidnealbassbaritone.com](http://davidnealbassbaritone.com).



American Modern Ensemble (AME) celebrates contemporary music via lively thematic programming. AME performs a wide repertoire, using a varied combination of instrumentalists, vocalists, and conductors, and the ensemble often highlights AME's house composer and founder, Robert Paterson. Since its inception in 2005, AME has performed hundreds of works by living composers, and has received critical success in *The New York Times*, *Time Out*, *the New Yorker*, among others. Sold out crowds at BAM, Merkin Hall, Lincoln Center, the Rubin Museum, Dixon Place, and National Sawdust are a winning testament to AME's fifteen-year track record as to what is 'right' about classical music today.

AME includes on-stage chats with composers and the creative team, allowing audience members to learn even more about the creative process. AME provides a welcoming environment for audiences, creators and performers. Over 95% of the composers AME has programmed have attended and participated in our shows, including luminaries such as John Luther Adams, John Corigliano, David Del Tredici, Aaron Jay Kernis, Libby Larsen, Steven Mackey, Paul Moravec, Christopher Rouse, Steven Stucky, Joan Tower, Chen Yi, and countless others. AME also enthusiastically performs works by America's most talented, emerging and mid-career composers.

AME produces stellar recordings via its house label, American Modern Recordings (AMR), which has received fantastic reviews in *Gramophone*, *the LA Music Examiner*, *The New York Times*, *Sequenza21*, and *New Music Box*, and our albums have made it to the Grammy® Ballot in past seasons.

AME's summer home is now at the Mostly Modern Festival (MMF), located in Saratoga Springs, New York. MMF celebrates the music of our time, and also hosts the Mostly Modern Festival Institute, which hosts over 120 musicians from around the world each season. Other residencies include Princeton University, James Madison University, Keene State College, the CUNY Graduate Center, Adelphi, Rutgers, and many more. AME is deeply invested in collaboration. Some examples are On Site Opera, Cutting Edge New Music Festival, Prototype Opera Festival, American Opera Projects, and the Dance Theater of Harlem.

For more information, visit [americanmodernensemble.org](http://americanmodernensemble.org)



## **Album Credits**

### **Recording**

Produced by Adam Abeshouse

Music by Robert Paterson, © Robert Paterson Music (ASCAP). Sheet music available from Bill Holab Music.

Performances by the American Modern Ensemble

Executive Producer: Robert Paterson

Recording Engineer for *Summer Songs*, *Autumn Songs*, and *Winter Songs*: Adam Abeshouse

Recording Engineer for *Spring Songs*: Silas Brown

Editing, Mixing, and Mastering: Adam Abeshouse

*Summer Songs* and *Autumn Songs* recorded at The DiMenna Center for Classical Music,  
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*Winter Songs* recorded at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, NY, June 11, 2011

*Spring Songs* recorded at the Arthur Zankel Music Center, Helen Filene Ladd Concert Hall,  
Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY, June 29, 2019

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Assistant Engineer for American Academy session: Andy Ryder

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Percussion Rental for American Academy session: New York Percussion Service

Percussion Rental for DiMenna session: Centanni Percussion

Piano Rental for American Academy session: Klavierhaus

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Robert Paterson image: Lisa-Marie Mazzucco

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– Robert Paterson



# The Four Seasons

ROBERT PATERSON  
AMERICAN MODERN ENSEMBLE

DISC 1

## Summer Songs

1. **I. Summer Music** (May Sarton) 3'58"
  2. **II. The Kite** (Anne Sexton) 4'56"
  3. **III. Childhood** (Sharan Strange) 4'44"
  4. **IV. Moths** (Jennifer O'Grady) 4'39"
  5. **V. Summer Night, Riverside** (Sara Teasdale) 5'19"
- Marnie Breckenridge, Soprano

DISC 2

## Winter Songs

1. **I. Icicles filled the long window** (Wallace Stevens) 2'37"
  2. **II. Dark Day, Warm and Windy** (A. R. Ammons) 3'22"
  3. **III. The Snow Man** (Wallace Stevens) 4'11"
  4. **IV. Boy at The Window** (Richard Wilbur) 4'07"
  5. **V. Old Story** (Robert Creeley) 2'56"
  6. **VI. Neither Snow** (Billy Collins) 3'28"
- David Neal, Bass-Baritone

## Autumn Songs

6. **I. Ascension: Autumn Dusk in Central Park** (Evelyn Scott) 4'16"
7. **II. Under The Harvest Moon** (Carl Sandburg) 3'25"
8. **III. All Hallows' Eve** (Dorothea Tanning) 2'10"
9. **IV. November for Beginners** (Rita Dove) 4'45"
10. **V. Leaves Before The Wind** (May Sarton) 4'33"

Blythe Gaissert, Mezzo-Soprano

Total Time: 42'52"

## Spring Songs

7. **I. English Sparrows (Washington Square)** (Edna St. Vincent Millay) 3'32"
8. **II. April 5, 1974** (Richard Wilbur) 3'24"
9. **III. Done With** (Ann Stanford) 5'20"
10. **IV. The Widow's Lament in Springtime** (William Carlos Williams) 4'54"
11. **V. Spring Rain** (Sara Teasdale) 3'30"

Alok Kumar, Tenor

Total Time: 41'26"

Produced by Adam Abeshouse

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