

. KAREN BENTLEY POLICK . FRANCESCO DI FIORE . WILLIAM SUSMAN .
. STAS VENGEVSKI . PATRICIA ZUBER .

. A QUIET MADNESS .
WILLIAM SUSMAN



1	Aria (2013)* Karen Bentley Pollick, violin & William Susman, piano	12:16
2	Quiet Rhythms No.1 (2010)** Francesco Di Fiore, piano	4:40
3	Seven Scenes for Four Flutes (2011)*** Patricia Zuber, flutes I. Build - II. Swirl - III. Echo - IV. Weave - V. Drift - VI. Jagged - VII. Shimmer	11:52
4	Quiet Rhythms No.5 (2010)** Francesco Di Fiore, piano	4:50
5	Zydeco Madness (2006)**** Stas Venglevski, accordion	9:52
6	Quiet Rhythms No.7 (2010)** Francesco Di Fiore, piano	4:11

TOTAL TIME 47:46

* Recorded and mixed by Cookie Marenco and Patrick O'Connor at OTR Studios, Belmont, CA, February 24, 2014

** Recorded by Francesco Di Fiore at FDF Studio, Catania, Italy, November 2016

*** Recorded and mixed by John Kilgore at Kilgore Sound, New York City, March to May 2018

**** Recorded by Dan Gnader at eDream Studio, Milwaukee, WI, May 2013

Music by William Susman

Produced by William Susman

Album Mixing by John Kilgore

Mastered by Alan Silverman at Arf! Mastering, New York City

Liner Notes by Rebecca Lentjes

Photo Credit (cover, geometric and composer) by Rick Chapman

Album Design by Valeria Di Matteo

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WILLIAM SUSMAN'S ALBUM A QUIET MADNESS

immediately immerses the listener in a peculiarly specific and undeniably beautiful sound world. This sound world is both absorbing and thought-provoking, allowing the ear and mind to make their own connections without feeling overwhelmed by sonic or narrative constraints. Susman's precise harmonic and rhythmic languages invite us into a subdued, enchanting expression of madness that roams all over the map, akin to the mind wandering during a rainy day—or, perhaps clairvoyantly, akin to the strange passage of time spent in self-isolation during the collective trauma of Covid-19. Susman is adept at juxtaposing non-Western musical techniques, such as Afro-Cuban clave and montuño, with Western classical stylistic devices. The juxtapositions heard in *A Quiet Madness* are seamless, even though their instrumental colors range widely from one piece to the next. While the album is best enjoyed all at once, it consists of several sections differentiated by their texture, rhythmic energy, dynamics, and instrumentation. These unhurried gradations glide into a heterogeneous sonic environment that still manages to coalesce into a cohesive whole.

A Quiet Madness unfolds across six pieces that were composed between 2006 and 2013. Susman assembled the order of these pieces on the album into a unified sonic trajectory that builds from its serene opening, the violin/piano duo *Aria*, to the propulsive *Zydeco Madness* and the driving chords of the concluding piece *Quiet Rhythms No. 7*. *Aria* is a part of Susman's

opera-in-progress, *Fordlandia*. On the album, Susman performs the piano part, accompanying Karen Bentley Pollick on violin. *Aria* sets the stage for this transformation with its interlacing melodies that periodically climb in intensity and then unspool into elegant, wandering threads. The next five pieces alternate between three solo piano pieces called *Quiet Rhythms* and two pieces with contrasting textures and structures: Susman's 2011 piece *Seven Scenes for Four Flutes*, which is recorded and multi-tracked by a single flutist, Patricia Zuber, and his 2006 work *Zydeco Madness*, played here by Stas Venglevski, who also performed the piece's premiere. The assortment of skilled and intuitive performers renders a musical space that is ideal for Susman's gradual yet substantial changes in harmony, timbre, and rhythm.

Although Susman describes the solo piano sections on this album as “quasi-interludes that also act as segues,” each of the *Quiet Rhythms* is in itself an intricate and autonomous musical exploration. These pieces are performed by the Italian pianist Francesco Di Fiore, who is himself a composer working in a post-modern post-minimalist language in the vein of Susman's. The three *Quiet Rhythms* heard in *A Quiet Madness* are taken from Susman's larger collection of *Quiet Rhythms*, each of which consist of a “prologue” and corresponding “action.” Susman composed the actions before the prologues, a compositional process that results in more effective foreshadowing of what's to come. The prologues introduce the general shapes of the chords, allowing both the performer and listener to get acquainted with the unique sound

world of an individual *Quiet Rhythm*. The actions then expound on this introductory harmonic groundwork; while the prologues are non-syncopated and “smooth,” the actions are syncopated and rhythmic. The effect unfolds through a subtly climbing temporal growth, rising out of moment-by-moment oscillations. These oscillations develop not only vertically but horizontally, through Susman’s use of aural illusions: “The amplitude cross-fade creates somewhat of an aural M.C. Escher effect where the ear may focus on either the left or right hand.”

The swirling introspection of *Quiet Rhythms* contrasts with the textures and pacing of *Seven Scenes for Four Flutes* and *Zydeco Madness*. *Seven Scenes for Four Flutes* evokes a sequence of abstract yet vividly colorful scenes that flit through seven distinct textures and interject a bright, breathless liveliness between the darker, more subdued energy of the *Quiet Rhythms*. Even greater contrast can be heard in *Zydeco Madness*, which Susman composed in 2006 as a response to the tragic events surrounding the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Susman, who had lived in New Orleans for a year and a half, was horrified by the politicized reaction to the devastation: “We all saw horrific news reports of people’s stuff floating, drifting and burning in currents slick with oil. I had this vision of someone’s accordion floating in this mess, and morphing into some giant monster accordion dripping with the fallout of toxic sludge.” This vision propelled him to compose *Zydeco Madness*, for Bayan, a large button accordion. In contrast to the other tracks, *Zydeco Madness* is unabashedly

disjunctive and agitated; Susman has explained that “the piece is episodic, jump-cutting from one event to the next like a news report.”

Zydeco Madness leads into the final track, *Quiet Rhythms No. 7*. Despite its weightier, knottier texture, the listener can hear echoes harkening back to the earlier *Quiet Rhythms*, while also being made aware of the larger transformation that has taken place across the album. The introductory clave patterns and layered polyrhythms of *Quiet Rhythms No. 1* set the tone for a musical atmosphere that effortlessly brings us to these concluding moments. This subtle thickening of intensity and density ultimately creates a musical experience that fluidly merges seemingly disparate sonic and narrative structures. Although Susman’s approach is grounded in rhythmic specificity, the minute details contribute to an overarching sonic trajectory that flows easily from one moment to the next. This ability to interweave evolving musical and extra-musical elements encourages an aural and narrative association between “quiet” and “madness,” two presumably dissimilar concepts that might overlap more than we think. Susman’s finely-honed mastery of rhythmic detail is on full display here, but just as significant is the development of both texture and energy that captivates the listener from beginning to end.

Rebecca Lentjes, Brooklyn, August 2020

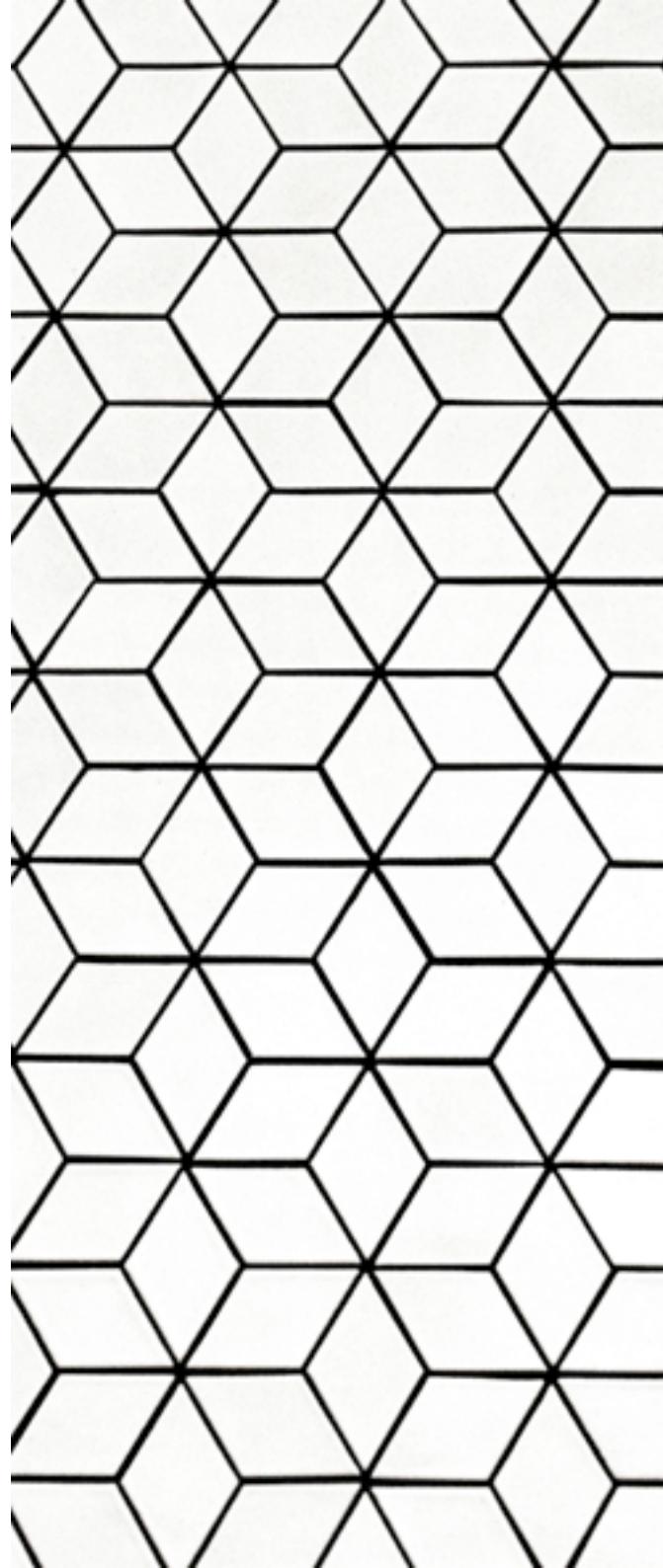
AMERICAN COMPOSER

WILLIAM SUSMAN has created a distinctively expressive voice in contemporary classical music, with a catalog that includes orchestral, chamber, and vocal music, as well as numerous film scores. In addition to his work as a composer, he spearheads the contemporary ensemble OCTET and Belarca Records. AllMusic calls him an exemplar of “the next developments in the sphere . . . [of] minimalism,” and *textura* describes him as “not averse to letting his affection for Afro-Cuban, jazz, and other forms seep into his creative output.” His music has earned praise from *The New York Times* for being “vivid, turbulent, and rich-textured,” from *Gramophone* as “texturally shimmering and harmonically ravishing,” and from *Fanfare* for being “gloriously lyrical . . . impeccably crafted.”

Susman’s training as a pianist in both jazz and classical traditions was influential in his evolution as a composer, and his music is notable for its integration of a variety of influences, including free jazz, Afro-Cuban music, and other non-Western folk traditions. With this toolkit, he crafts a bold sound world both familiar and complex, with highly energetic grooves and hypnotic modal-based harmonies. His orchestral and chamber music has been widely performed in the U.S., Europe, China, and Japan. Susman’s music is uniquely suited to film, and he is recognized for scoring such award-winning works as *Native New Yorker* (Best Documentary Film, Tribeca Film Festival), which was honored in 2015 as one of the best in American experimental film by the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

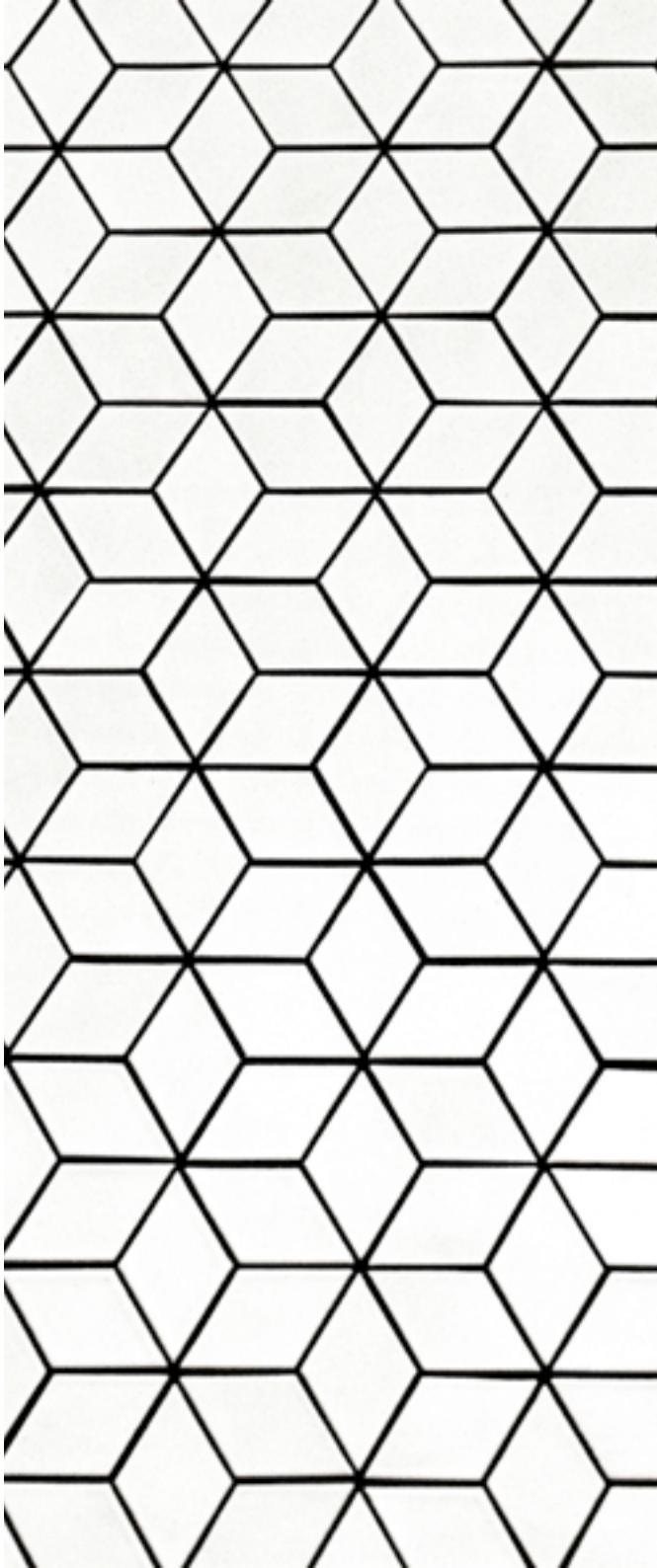


KAREN BENTLEY POLICK is one of America's leading contemporary musicians, performing a wide range of solo repertoire and styles on violin, viola, piano and Norwegian Hardanger fiddle(hardingfele) to extend the boundaries of the concert experience, from the Baroque to cutting-edge contemporary music and live improvisations. She currently serves as concertmaster of Valse Café Orchestra in Seattle, and Principal Second Violin and Festival Artist with the Colorado MahlerFest Orchestra in Boulder. She plays on a violin made by Jean Baptiste Vuillaume in 1860 and a viola made in 1987 by William Whedbee. Karen was awarded a grant from the Alabama State Council for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts for 'Solo Violin and Alternating Currents' and subsequently launched 'Violin, Viola & Video Virtuosity' that now comprises dozens of videos projected onto the violinist. Karen received a Seed Money Grant for Disseminated Performances from New York Women Composers.



FRANCESCO DI FIORE, pianist and composer, was born in Palermo. His teachers included Harald Ossberger, Bruno Canino, Peter Toperczer and Eliodoro Sollima. In 1986, he launched his concert career performing hundreds of concerts worldwide. In 1993 he won the "XV Internationales Kammermusik Festival Austria Waldviertel" in Horn, Austria. From 1990 to 2004 he was artistic director at "Associazione Philharmonia Centro Iniziative Musicali." Difficult to categorize, his music has elements of both post-modernism and post-minimalism. Alongside numerous pieces for piano, he has composed chamber and orchestral music, film soundtracks and stage music. In 2011, a project called "Miniature" engaged audiences worldwide by posting one new piano composition per week shared for free on his website, for a total of 53 pieces and 207 minutes of music. He has toured extensively with video artist Valeria Di Matteo, performing their projects Piano Sequenza and Visual Piano. His albums are available on the Dutch label Zefir Records.

PATRICIA ZUBER has performed with many major orchestras in the New York area including American Symphony Orchestra, New York City Opera, New York City Ballet, American Composers Orchestra, New Jersey Symphony, and the Westchester Philharmonic. She appears regularly with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra at Lincoln Center, having performed with them at Carnegie Hall, on live high definition broadcasts to theaters across the globe, on tour in Japan, and in the Grammy Award winning DVDs of the Met's Ring Cycle. She has also performed on Broadway, having performed in the productions of Beauty and the Beast, Candide, Swan Lake, Jekyll and Hyde, Ragtime, and La Boheme. She is piccoloist with the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic and plays in the summer at Santa Fe Opera. She performs in Duo Zuber with her husband, percussionist Greg Zuber. Their album, Blackbird Redux, is available on Belarca Records.



STAS VENGEVSKI is a native of the Republic of Moldova, part of the former Soviet Union. His artistry, dazzling technical command, and sensitivity have brought increasing acclaim as a virtuoso of the Bayan. A two-time first prize winner of the Bayan Competition in the Republic of Moldova, Stas is a graduate of the Russian Academy of Music in Moscow where he received his Masters in Music under the tutelage of the famed Russian Bayanist, Friedrich Lips. In 1992, he immigrated to the United States. He has toured extensively as a soloist throughout the former Soviet Union, Canada, Europe, and the United States. Additionally, he has performed with symphony orchestras throughout the United States. He is a regular participant with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra's Arts in Community Education Program (ACE) and has performed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Tacoma Symphony Orchestra.