



By Andrew Norman

I wish you all could see Play performed live.

The symphony orchestra is, for me, an instrument that needs to be experienced live. It is a medium as much about human energy as it is about sound, as much about watching choices being made and thoughts exchanged and feats of physical coordination performed as it is about listening to the melodies and harmonies and rhythms that result from those actions.

As its name might suggest, *Play* is an exploration of the many ways that people in an orchestra can play with, against, or apart from one another. Like much of my music, it tries to make the most of the innate physicality and theatricality of live instrumental performance. *Play* is very directly concerned with how and when and why players move—with the visual as well as the aural spectacle that is symphonic music—and as such there are layers of its meaning and structure that might be difficult to discern on an audio recording.

So you, the listener of this album, will have to use your imagination, as you are not going to see much of what defines *Play*'s expressive world. You're not going to see how the conductor does or doesn't control the goings-on at any particular moment. You're not going to see how players often freeze in place, mid-breath and -bow-stroke, waiting to be turned on again by the flick of a percussive switch. You're not going to see how the tiny ballet of pitchless finger-shifts at the beginning of Level 2 or the epic battle of slapsticks later in that movement play out in spatial, kinetic, choreographic terms on the stage. And you're not going to see the 28 individuals who each offer a single solo note to create the work's final phrase, because (and this is perhaps the most frustrating part of orchestral

recordings for me), you're not going to be able to connect the sounds on this CD with the specific people who made them.

But let me tell you: the specific people who made the sounds on this CD are extraordinary. I had the amazing opportunity to get to know Gil Rose, the musicians of BMOP, and the loyal audience they've built during my two years as composer in residence with this singular orchestra. I learned so much from the BMOP community, not only about why they love playing and listening to contemporary orchestral music, but also about what I love and find fascinating about the medium. Gil and his players are fun and fearless and astoundingly gifted. Their collective capacity for risk-taking and experimentation is unique among symphony orchestras and truly inspiring, and I tried to honor their spirit throughout the writing of *Play*.

Writing *Play* took the better part of a year, but it represents the culmination of a few lines of thought I've been pursuing for several years. I often work in an iterative way, further honing the materials and implications of one piece in the next. Such is the case with *Try* and *Play*. While not knowing it at the time, *Try* ended up as a kind of beta version of *Play*, a smaller-scaled test run for a few of the ideas that would be incorporated into *Play's* conceptual framework. I'm thrilled that BMOP has included *Try* on this disc as something of a bonus track, a point of reference to show where my thinking started and how it developed in the construction of the larger symphonic work.

Play also draws on the Music in Circles series of pieces I wrote in 2012 and 2013. While Try is largely about building big shapes by juxtaposing small, incongruous fragments of material, the Music in Circles series (including pieces for yMusic, the Walden Chamber Players, the Ensemble Berlin, and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra) is about the continuous, linear development and transformation of material from one thing into another. These pieces also share in common a wedge–shaped melodic line that became a bit of an idée fixe for me a couple years ago. I was obsessed with this wedge—a simple, logically predictable line that starts on C and unfolds outward in ever–greater intervals—and I examined it from many

different angles, turning it upside down and backward and around and around in the *Music* in *Circles* pieces. Ultimately it is the story of this wedge—one might say the wedge's search for its true and complete self—that forms the basic plot of *Play*.

I definitely thought of and planned *Play* in terms of story arc and narrative and characters and conflicts (in short, many of the attributes that might make for an effective, um, play). I started at the work's climax, where the wedge finally spreads through the entire orchestra in a giant spinning canon, and I worked backward from there, constructing threads of a story that might each plausibly lead to such a moment. So in one sense *Play* is a determinedly goal-oriented journey.

But in another sense, *Play* is a highly mutable and open-ended journey. No two performances of this piece will be remotely similar because the score demands a multitude of small acts of choice-making from both the players and conductor. When multiplied out, these tiny, inthe-moment, butterfly-wing-flapping choices lead to tidal waves of interpretive difference from performance to performance, and that is precisely what makes the live experience of this, but really of *any* notated orchestral music, so incredibly exciting for me. BMOP's performance of *Play*, astonishingly and gorgeously rendered though it is, is but one of the many, many ways this piece could convincingly unfold, and my hope is that if this music is to your liking, you and I will someday get to share a room with another group of musicians playing this piece, to see and hear what they've got to say with and through *Play*.



PLAY is scored for full orchestra, including three extensive percussion batteries and piano. It was commissioned by and dedicated to the Boston Modern Orchestra Project with funding from Music Alive, a national residency program of the League of American Orchestras and New Music USA. Gil Rose and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project gave the premiere on May 17, 2013 in Jordan Hall in Roston

TRY is scored for fifteen woodwind, brass, percussion, string, and piano players. It was commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. John Adams led the LA Phil at the premiere in Disney Hall, Los Angeles in May 2011.

By Daniel Stephen Johnson

A "painter's painter," a "poet's poet"—is there a more pretentious or meaningless epithet for a critic to slap on an artist? But the label seems inevitable in the case of Andrew Norman. In their unguarded moments, a community of artists can be a truly merciless bunch, and so the praise they do offer carries that much more weight. Even when Norman was an undergraduate, studying keyboard performance as well as composition at the University of Southern California, making music vastly different from his mature body of work, his fellow composers, behind his back, spoke of his lovely and polished writing with sincere admiration.

We both graduated from USC and went our separate ways; then, by coincidence, I ran into Andrew Norman again when I found myself living in New Haven during his studies at Yale, and then yet again when we were both living in the Bedford—Stuyvesant neighborhood of

Brooklyn. There have been any number of attempts, by critics and PR departments alike, to use the perceived hipness of Brooklyn as a kind of selling point for the composers—largely coming out of Yale and Princeton, often attempting to blur the lines between "classical" and "popular" composition and performance—who have used that borough as their base of operations. But if these generalizations were a poor fit for most of the composers yoked together as the Brooklyn Scene, they were comically inapt in the case of Andrew Norman, who has never seemed a part of any clique, and whose music is utterly individual.

He co-founded the Sleeping Giant collective of composers, along with Timo Andres, Christopher Cerrone, Jacob Cooper, Ted Hearne and Robert Honstein, but aside from their mutual support and admiration and a Yale-to-Brooklyn career path, these composers have next to nothing in common. Norman headed back to USC, this time as a professor of composition, and (Hearne also having been hired to the same faculty) there has been talk of the school's hiring a pair of "Brooklyn composers" for these positions. But Norman is no more a Brooklyn composer than he is a "California composer" or a "Yale composer"—that is to say, not at all.

Still, he remains a "composer's composer." The running joke among the members of the Sleeping Giant gang that are active on Twitter (Norman, despite his pop-cultural fluency, still doesn't have an account) seems to be that they can use the social media site to offer extravagant praise for his music without making him self-conscious.

That would be a much a better label for Norman: he is a self-conscious composer. In person, he is charmingly self-effacing, soft-spoken and shy. In conversation, he is self-deprecating and self-critical, quick to put down his own work. In his music, he is plagued by self-doubt: for all the laurels and admiration that he has received ever since he started composing, his journey from pianist to composer was far from certain.

But this self-consciousness, permeating his recent music, might be part of what makes it so exciting to his peers. His music is finely wrought, but not with a seamless, designed-by-Apple polish. It is full of the struggle to make, or to justify making, any music at all.

Norman has written about his orchestral study *Try* [4] as an explicit realization of this struggle. *Try* could be usefully viewed as a sort of appendix, or companion piece, to the longer work on this album, which uses many of the same strategies on a larger scale. The composer explains that *Try* could be heard as a series of false starts, multiple attempts to crack into the material from different angles of approach, stitched together into one coherent piece of music.

But the same spirit animates much of his music, sometimes in hidden ways. Another cliché for writing about art: critics love to ask whether a moment of sentiment or loveliness in a narrative or a piece of music has been "earned"—that is to say, whether it can be justified formally, whether it has been prepared by an adequately rigorous lead-up, and so forth. As an across-the-board rubric, this philosophy has its problems, but as a motivating principle for creating a work of art, Andrew Norman has taken it to heart. One of his most admired works, the string trio A Companion Guide to Rome, is a series of sketches inspired by the Roman churches Norman admired as a fellow at the American Academy there, and as such is a whirlwind of wild, formally evocative, and highly idiomatic string techniques—informed by Norman's background as a violist as well as pianist—but these give way gradually and unexpectedly to a climax of deeply affecting harmonies, epiphanies that rise up gleaming from the dross of sound

Play, like Try, like A Companion Guide, dramatizes this same creative conflict within itself. Norman's explanation of his title for this imposing work suggests that the word Play is a bit of, well, wordplay: in addition to playing an instrument, one can play—meaning to frolic, to play around—or, on the other hand, one can get played—meaning to be manipulated, to play the fool. The piece offers plenty of the former, often leaping frenetically between

musical ideas, but is also concerned with the issues of control that arise from orchestral composition, and the ways in which an ensemble that plays together (in one sense), plays together (in another).

He also explores the ways in which the composer can "play" a performer, ranging from moments of aleatoric noise in the orchestra to the exertion of a degree of control that is inaudible on this recording: the second movement actually ends with specific instructions to the players, and even the conductor, telling them how to "freeze" when they stop playing, when to turn the page, and when to put down their instruments or hands.

And here is a convergence between "play" in the sense of frolic and "play" in the sense of control: games have rules, from the rulebooks that govern professional sports to the in-game physics that govern and limit the player's control of a video game sprite.

The title of each movement winks at the world of video games—"Level 1," [1] "Level 2," [2] "Level 3" [3]—as if each depicted a scenario of ascending difficulty. Even in its most abstract moments, *Play* is grounded by an audible system of cause and effect, reminiscent of a Rube Goldberg contraption when it tends towards the slapstick (literally: the slapstick is one of the percussion instruments providing these cues), and in other passages simply providing a clear and tangible sense of structure to the listener. His score lists for the conductor a few of the functions that different musical gestures serve in terms of the music's internal logic, like a gamer's cheat codes: a triangle chime freezes and unfreezes the action; the log drums and woodblock turn "on" and "off" the strings and winds, respectively; the temple blocks cue a transfer of an idea from one instrument to another; and—perhaps most significant to the unfolding of Level 2—the sonorous slapstick/kickdrum combo signals a jump cut to an entirely different musical universe.

This is not, amusingly, the first time Norman has drawn a comparison between virtuosity at playing musical instruments and virtuosity at playing video games. His far more light-

hearted early work *Gran Turismo* was inspired by the car-racing game of the same name; one critic dismissed the piece as "short enough (eight minutes) to be enjoyed as a fast ride to nowhere," which suggests that he missed the joke almost spectacularly: an auto race, and especially a simulated auto race, is *exactly* a fast ride to nowhere, which makes something of a satirical comment, however good-humored, about the value we place on virtuosity.

With *Play*, that notion of virtuosity has been enlarged to include more avant–garde performance techniques, more *A Companion Guide to Rome* than *Gran Turismo*, a little more punishing than flattering, and that hint of sadism—combined with the music's themes of control—makes the joke a slightly darker one, as the players are jerked through their paces like Super Mario in the hands of an angry God.

But like *A Companion Guide*, this piece surprises the listener with another kind of gravity. Running through *Play* again and again is a "wedge" figure of intersecting scales, one climbing up and one descending, simultaneously, so that we can hear the music struggling uphill, being pulled gradually downward, or being tugged in both directions at once. Norman transforms this figure into a soaring melody, leaping and falling with sobs and sighs, and it is because he has turned what might have been a purely schematic gesture into an overtly Romantic one that this sentimental moment seems, as they say, earned. "Sing It!" the score commands the strings at one point, complete with boldface font, exclamation mark and capital letters, and if they do their job, the audience will experience a collective emotional thrill.

And that is because they are being played. This is exactly that form of musical manipulation about which Norman is most ambivalent: the manipulation of the audience by the composer. What seduced him into composing was the emotional power that a simple chord progression can have over the audience; over the years, that allure has been tempered by a certain skepticism. Elsewhere in the piece, Norman pulverizes that legato wedge-figure into a pointillistic scatter of notes across the different instruments of the orchestra, and the tone of his notation is far different from that "Sing It!": the rhythm is tricky, he says in

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this passage, but doesn't have to be exact. "Let the players take care of themselves," he suggests to the conductor, "and the intended effect" will come across.

He ends with a similar pointillistic wedge figure, and this conclusion is in its way more poignant than that soaring Romantic melody—he eases up his grip on the controls, lets go of the audience just a little, and simply allows them to feel.

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Daniel Stephen Johnson lives in Bushwick, Brooklyn, and works as a sheet music salesman in Queens. He's written program notes for musicians including Daniel Bjamason, Nico Muhly and Gidon Kremer. and is a contributor to Opera News, Parterre Box, and other magazines.

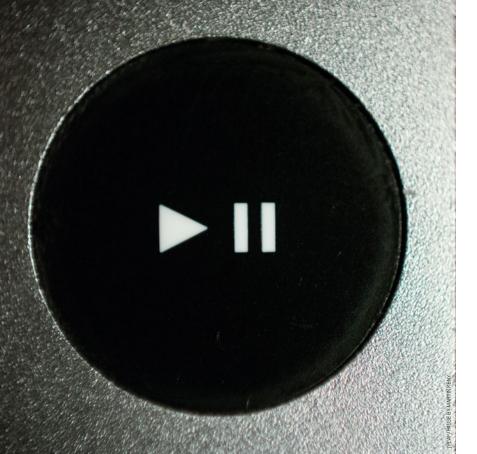


Andrew Norman is a composer of orchestral, chamber, and vocal music. He uses a wide variety of sonic resources to explore the physicality and theatricality of live instrumental performance, the role of choice-making in the interpretation of musical notation, and the possibilities for non-linear storytelling in abstract musical forms. His work has been praised in the *New York Times* for its "daring juxtapositions and dazzling colors" and in the *Los Angeles Times* for its "Chaplinesge" wit.

Andrew's work has been performed by many of the world's leading orchestras, including the Los Angeles and New York Philharmonics, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Tonhalle Orchester Zurich, and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Andrew's work has been commissioned by the Berlin Philharmonic, the Aspen Music Festival, the BBC Symphony and the Utah Symphony among many others, and he has served as composer in residence with Young Concert Artists, the Heidelberg Philharmonic, the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and Opera Philadelphia. Andrew's work has been championed by some of classical music's leading figures, including Gustavo Dudamel, Simon Rattle, Marin Alsop, John Adams, David Robertson, Emanuel Ax, Jeffrey Kahane, Jeremy Denk, Colin Currie, and Jennifer Koh.

Andrew is the recipient of the 2005 ASCAP Nissim Prize, the 2006 Rome Prize, the 2009 Berlin Prize, and in 2012 he was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Music. Andrew teaches at the University of Southern California and his works are published by Schott.

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Gil Rose is a conductor helping to shape the future of classical music. His dynamic performances and many recordings have garnered international critical praise.

In 1996, Mr. Rose founded the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP), the foremost professional orchestra dedicated exclusively to performing and recording symphonic music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Under his leadership, BMOP's unique programming and high performance standards have attracted critical acclaim and

earned the orchestra fifteen ASCAP awards for adventurous programming as well as the John S. Edwards Award for Strongest Commitment to New American Music.

Mr. Rose maintains a busy schedule as a guest conductor on both the opera and symphonic platforms. He made his Tanglewood debut in 2002 and in 2003 he debuted with the Netherlands Radio Symphony at the Holland Festival. He has led the American Composers Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra of the Ukraine, Cleveland Chamber Symphony. Orchestra della Syizzera Italiana. and National Orchestra of Porto.

Over the past decade, Mr. Rose has also built a reputation as one of the country's most inventive and versatile opera conductors. He recently announced the formation of Odyssey Opera, a company dedicated to presenting eclectic operatic repertoire in a variety of formats. The company debuted in September 2013 to critical acclaim with a concert production of Wagner's *Rienzi*. Prior to Odyssey Opera, he led Opera Boston as its Music Director starting in 2003, and in 2010 was appointed the company's first Artistic Director. Mr. Rose led Opera Boston in several American and New England premieres including Shostakovich's *The Nose*, Weber's *Der Freischütz*, and Hindemith's *Cardillac*. In 2009, Mr. Rose led the world premiere of Zhou Long's *Madame White Snake*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2011.

Mr. Rose also served as the artistic director of Opera Unlimited, a contemporary opera festival associated with Opera Boston. With Opera Unlimited, he led the world premiere of Elena Ruehr's *Toussaint Before the Spirits*, the New England premiere of Thomas Adès's *Powder Her Face*, as well as the revival of John Harbison's *Full Moon in March*, and the North American premiere of Peter Eötvös's *Angels in America*.

Mr. Rose and BMOP recently partnered with the American Repertory Theater, Chicago Opera Theater, and the MIT Media Lab to create the world premiere of composer Tod Machover's *Death and the Powers* (a runner-up for the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in Music). He conducted this seminal multimedia work at its world premiere at the Opera Garnier in Monte Carlo, Monaco, in September 2010, and also led its United States premiere in Boston and a subsequent performance at Chicago Opera Theater.

An active recording artist, Gil Rose serves as the executive producer of the BMOP/sound recording label. His extensive discography includes world premiere recordings of music by John Cage, Lukas Foss, Charles Fussell, Michael Gandolfi, Tod Machover, Steven Mackey, Evan Ziporyn, and many others on such labels as Albany, Arsis, Chandos, ECM, Naxos, New World, and BMOP/sound.

He has led the longstanding Monadnock Music Festival in historic Peterborough, NH, since his appointment as Artistic Director in 2012, conducting several premieres and making his opera stage directing debut in two revivals of operas by Dominick Argento.

As an educator Mr. Rose served five years as Director of Orchestral Activities at Tufts University and in 2012 he joined the faculty of Northeastern University as Artist-in-Residence and returned to his alma mater Carnegie Mellon University to lead the Opera Studio in a revival of Copland's *The Tender Land*. In 2007, Mr. Rose was awarded Columbia University's prestigious Ditson Award as well as an ASCAP Concert Music Award for his exemplary commitment to new American music. He is a three-time Grammy Award nominee.



The **Boston Modern Orchestra Project** (BMOP) is widely recognized as the leading orchestra in the United States dedicated exclusively to performing new music, and its signature record label, BMOP/sound, is the nation's foremost label launched by an orchestra and solely devoted to new music recordings.

Founded in 1996 by Artistic Director Gil Rose, BMOP affirms its mission to illuminate the connections that exist naturally between contemporary music and contemporary society by reuniting composers and audiences in a shared concert experience. In its first eighteen seasons, BMOP established a track record that includes more than one hundred performances, over a hundred world premieres (including forty commissioned works), two Opera Unlimited festivals with Opera Boston, the inaugural Ditson Festival of Contemporary Music with the ICA/Boston, and sixty commercial recordings, including thirty-nine CDs from BMOP/sound.

In March 2008, BMOP launched its signature record label, BMOP/sound, with the release of John Harbison's ballet *Ulysses*. Its composer–centric releases focus on orchestral works that are otherwise unavailable in recorded form. The response to the label was immediate and celebratory; its five inaugural releases appeared on the "Best of 2008" lists of the *New*

York Times, the Boston Globe, National Public Radio, Downbeat, and American Record Guide, among others. BMOP/sound is the recipient of five Grammy Award nominations: in 2009 for Charles Fussell: Wilde; in 2010 for Derek Bermel: Voices; and three nominations in 2011 for its recording of Steven Mackey: Dreamhouse (including Best Classical Album). The New York Times proclaimed, "BMOP/sound is an example of everything done right." Additional BMOP recordings are available from Albany, Arsis, Cantaloupe, Centaur, Chandos, ECM, Innova, Naxos, New World, and Oxingale.

In Boston, BMOP performs at Jordan Hall and Symphony Hall, and the orchestra has also performed in New York at Miller Theater, the Winter Garden, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, and The Lyceum in Brooklyn. A perennial winner of the ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming of Orchestral Music and 2006 winner of the John S. Edwards Award for Strongest Commitment to New American Music, BMOP has appeared at the Bank of America Celebrity Series (Boston, MA), Tanglewood, the Boston Cyberarts Festival, the Festival of New American Music (Sacramento, CA), and Music on the Edge (Pittsburgh, PA). In April 2008, BMOP headlined the 10th Annual MATA Festival in New York.

BMOP's greatest strength is the artistic distinction of its musicians and performances. Each season, Gil Rose, recipient of Columbia University's prestigious Ditson Conductor's Award as well as an ASCAP Concert Music Award for his extraordinary contribution to new music, gathers together an outstanding orchestra of dynamic and talented young performers, and presents some of the world's top vocal and instrumental soloists. The Boston Globe claims, "Gil Rose is some kind of genius; his concerts are wildly entertaining, intellectually rigorous, and meaningful." Of BMOP performances, the New York Times says: "Mr. Rose and his team filled the music with rich, decisive ensemble colors and magnificent solos. These musicians were rapturous—superb instrumentalists at work and play."

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FLUTE

Sarah Brady (piccolo)* [1-2] Rachel Braude [1]

OBOE

Laura Pardee Schaefer [1] Jennifer Slowik* [1-2]

CLARINET

Amy Advocat (bass clarinet)
[1-2]
Jan Halloran* [1]

BASSOON

Ronald Haroutunian [2] Gregory Newton* [1] Margaret Phillips [1]

HORN

Eli Epstein* [1-2] Neil Godwin [1] Kevin Owen [1] Ken Pope [1]

TRUMPET

Terry Everson* [1-2] Tony Gimenez [1] Richard Watson [1]

TROMBONE

Alexei Doohovskoy [1-2] Martin Wittenberg* [1]

BASS TROMBONE

Chris Beaudry [1]

TUBA

Dan Hunter [1]

PERCUSSION

Craig McNutt [1-2] Robert Schulz* [1-2] Nicholas Tolle [1]

PIANO

Linda Osborn [1] Yukiko Takagi [2]

VIOLINI

Piotr Buczek [1]
Sasha Callahan [1]
Charles Dimmick*[1-2]
Alice Hallstrom [1]
Lilit Hartunian [1]
Oana Lacatus [1]
Sonja Larson [1]
Shaw Pong Liu [1]
Amy Sims [1]
Sarita Uranovsky [1]
Lena Wong [1]
Ethan Wood [1]

VIOLIN II

Melanie Auclair-Fortier [1] Elizabeth Abbate [1] Stacy Alden [1] Deborah Boykan [1] Colleen Brannen* [1] Julia Cash [1] Sue Faux [1] Tera Gorsett [1] Anna Korsunsky [1] Mina Lavcheva [1] Liesl Schoenberger [2]

VIOLA

Joan Ellersick*[1-2] David Feltner [1] Noriko Herndon [1] Kimberly Lehmann [1] Dimitar Petkov [1] Emily Rideout [1] Emily Rome [1] Alexander Vavilov [1]

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CELLO

Miriam Bolkosky 111 Holaen Gioni [1] Katherine Kavaian [1] Jina Li 17-21 Amy Wensink [1] David Russell*m

BASS

Anthony D'Amico* [1-2] Scot Fitzsimmons m Elizabeth Foulser [1] Bebo Shiu m

KEY

[]] Play [21 Trv

*Principals

Andrew Norman

Play Try

Producer Gil Rose Recording and postproduction Joel Gordon

Play and Try are published by Schott Music.

Try was recorded on June 1, 2012 at Distler Performance Hall (Medford, MA) and Play was recorded on July 1, 2013 at Jordan Hall at New England Conservatory (Boston, MA).

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I would like to thank all those people who helped make this album possible. To Linda and Stuart Nelson for their generous lead gift, and to all the people who helped fund our Kickstarter campaign, I owe a huge debt of gratitude. I'm also incredibly grateful to New Music USA for funding my Music Alive residency with BMOP. And lastly, I would like to thank Gil Rose. Joel Gordon, and the amazing musicians of BMOP for bringing my vision to life and for capturing it so beautifully on this recording. -Andrew Norman



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