BMOP sound

JEREMY GILL:
FOUR LEGENDS FROM THE SILMARILLION

JEREMY GILL b.1975

FOUR LEGENDS FROM THE SILMARILLION

BOSTON MODERN ORCHESTRA PROJECT
Gil Rose, conductor

FOUR LEGENDS FROM THE SILMARILLION (2023)

[1] I. Ainulindalë 18:01
[2] II. Narsilion 14:42
[3] III. Tinúviel 16:21
[4] IV. Eärendil 15:07

TOTAL 64:14

MAP DEPICTING THE FICTITIOUS REALMS OF MIDDLE EARTH AND THE UNDYING LANDS (DETAIL). UNKNOWN ARTIST.

By Jeremy Gill

Ainulindalë was commissioned by Lois Grass and premiered by the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra (my hometown orchestra) in 2018. The HSO had offered me rather a unique opportunity: to compose pretty much any kind of work I wanted, for a relatively large orchestra. A childhood friend, Michael Zlogar, had been urging me for years to set J. R. R. Tolkien's creation myth, so this seemed like the perfect opportunity to do it. I composed *Ainulindalë* over eight months in 2016–17, during which time I immersed myself in the tone poems of, primarily, Strauss and Sibelius with two principal aims: to create a tone poem that was *symphonic*—that proceeded with *musical* sense despite conveying a non-musical narrative—and to allow the orchestra to *sound* convincingly. I poured everything I could into *Ainulindalë*, assuming it to be a stand-alone work.

When I shared *Ainulindalë* with Gil Rose, however, he heard it as the beginning of a larger set of tone poems, and BMOP commissioned *Narsilion*, *Tinúviel*, and *Eärendil* in 2022 with the generous support of—again—Lois Grass; Lois was one of my dearest friends and most ardent supporters, and these were the last of many commissions she supported before her death that same year. Now I was faced with a quandary: how to continue the narrative of a work that felt, to me, very much complete? *Ainulindalë* is a theme and variations, and I had striven to exhaust the theme's possibilities. Could I create new worlds to succeed it that felt somehow cut from the same or similar cloth? Add to this a further challenge, which I am

somewhat loath to admit: I was not, in the strictest sense of the word, a "fan" of Tolkien's work. I had read *The Silmarillion* for the first time only just before composing *Ainulindalë...*

But I quickly became a fan: I read Tolkien's biography, and, in addition to his more famous works, acquainted myself with obscurer ones, like *The Lays of Beleriand*. I explored Tolkien's inspirations, foremost among them the great Finnish *Kalevala*. I created detailed "librettos" for each of the ensuing tone poems (and later distilled them into the program notes that follow), that together fashioned a narrative that hit the highest notes of the various—and unfinished, it should be remembered—tales that collectively make up *The Silmarillion*.

The entire project took on the air of a great adventure, strongly enhanced by the fact that I composed these three new tone poems during many continuous months of travel. *Narsilion* was composed over four months in Edinburgh, Scotland; *Tinúviel* over two in Tel Aviv, Israel; and *Eärendil* over another two in Brunnen, a small Swiss town situated on Lake Lucerne, where I was a resident composer at the Villa Schoeck. There is a whiff of each place in these works: the grand, enduring Edinburgh Castle and nearby Arthur's Seat; the desert paradise of En Gedi along the Dead Sea coast; the Alpine trails that I hiked almost daily, and that would unexpectedly open out to vistas of unparalleled splendor.

FOUR LEGENDS FROM THE SILMARILLION *is scored for large orchestra.* Ainulindalë *was commissioned by Lois Lehrman Grass and premiered by the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra in 2018.* Narsilion, Tinúviel, *and* Eärendil *were commissioned by Boston Modern Orchestra Project and the* Four Legends *premiered as a complete cycle in 2025.*

ON THE SYMPHONIC TONE POEM

By Gil Rose

The history of using musical material to tell a story or "paint a picture" dates back to even before the Renaissance. Early examples include composers such as William Byrd, Heinrich Biber, and Vivaldi in *The Four Seasons*. These composers and others sought to depict people, animals, weather, and even battles. The tone poem, also known as the symphonic poem, expanded on this technique to express a narrative, a complex idea, or the character of a hero (or villain). Unlike the traditional symphony, which generally follows established formal structures, the tone poem allows composers greater freedom to create music inspired by literature, mythology, history, or nature. Emerging during the Romantic era of the nineteenth century, the tone poem became one of the most important forms of orchestral music, encouraging listeners to imagine vivid scenes and narratives.

The composer most closely associated with the invention of the tone poem is Franz Liszt. During his tenure as music director in Weimar in the 1850s, Liszt composed a series of thirteen symphonic poems that helped establish the genre and set the standard for what the symphonic poem could be. Influenced by the writings of philosophers and poets, as well

as the innovations of composers such as Hector Berlioz, Liszt believed that orchestral music could convey ideas beyond purely musical forms. Works such as *Les Préludes*, *Mazeppa*, and *Orpheus* demonstrate his use of thematic transformation, a technique in which a single musical theme evolves throughout a composition to reflect different emotions or events. This approach gave his tone poems both unity and dramatic flexibility, making them highly influential for later composers.

Many followed Liszt's example, most famously Richard Strauss, who expanded the scale and complexity of the genre in the late nineteenth century. Strauss's tone poems are notable for their brilliant orchestration, vivid storytelling, and technical sophistication. Works such as *Don Juan*, *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and *Ein Heldenleben* portray legendary heroes, philosophical ideas, and humorous adventures with remarkable realism. Strauss employed a large orchestra and an innovative harmonic language to create striking musical imagery, pushing the tone poem to new artistic heights.

The tone poem tradition continued into the early 20th century through other composers, most notably Jean Sibelius, whose works reflect Finland's landscapes, legends, and national identity. While Sibelius admired Liszt's innovations, he developed a more restrained and organic approach to musical structure. Rather than presenting a sequence of dramatic episodes, Sibelius often allowed his musical ideas to grow naturally from small motifs. Tone poems such as *Finlandia*, *The Swan of Tuonela*, *Pohjola's Daughter*, and *Tapiola* evoke the myths of the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*, as well as the beauty and mystery of the Nordic landscape. His music combines rich orchestral color with an economy of material that influenced many twentieth-century composers.

Continuing from Sibelius, the tone poem has taken as many forms and variations as there have been musical voices. Edward Elgar's *Falstaff*, Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*, Respighi's *Roman Trilogy* (*Fountains*, *Festivals*, and *Pines*), Copland's *El Salon Mexico,*

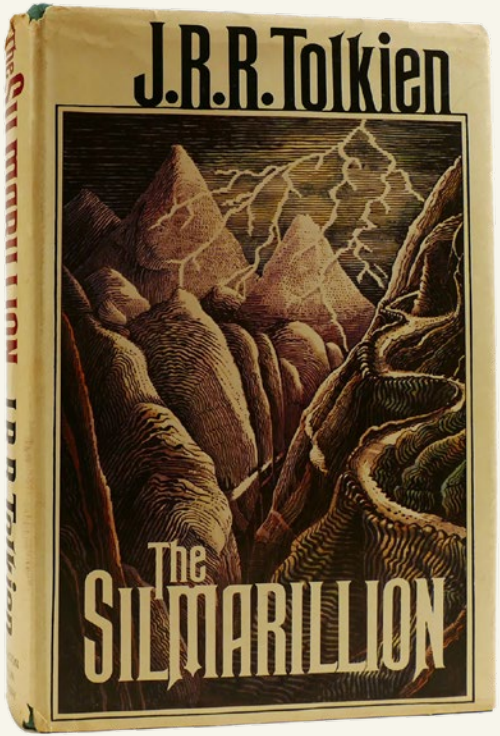
and even George Gershwin's *An American in Paris* all owe their lifeblood to the spirit of the symphonic poem. Always telling a story (often a very specific one) with color, drama, and virtuosity, the symphonic poem remains alive in the 21st century, as the *Four Legends of the Silmarillion* so ably exemplify.

FOUR LEGENDS FROM THE SILMARILLION

Program notes by Jeremy Gill

[**1**] AINULINDALË

Ainulindalë is Tolkien's creation myth, and his act of creation is effected through music in the form of a theme and variations. My *Ainulindalë* begins in a fragmented time-before-time, out of which Ilúvatar—Tolkien's supreme being—announces a grand theme [**02:02**] (in my setting, it is strongly colored by the overtone series). The Ainur—immortal spirits created by Ilúvatar—are instructed to vary this theme according to their own proclivities. The first variations [**03:23**] belong to Ulmo, whose milieu is water; these are roiling, in 7/8 time, though they ultimately settle into something more placid. The second variations [**06:22**] are Manwë's, whose realm is the air; these are quicksilver, sometimes heroic, alternating between 2/4 and 6/8. The third variations [**10:40**] emerge from Aulë, whose concern is the earth; his music is noble, in 5/4 time, remembering bits of Ulmo's watery variations. These end in a frosty stasis, preparing the way for the fourth and most complex set of variations: Melkor's, whose purpose is fire [**13:09**]. Melkor is a Lucifer-like character who seeks to undermine the work of his peers and supplant Ilúvatar's theme with his own. *Ainulindalë* concludes with a great battle that is ultimately interrupted by the intervention of Ilúvatar himself, who raises both hands



FIRST AMERICAN EDITION OF *THE SILMARILLION*

to silence the din: "and in one chord, deeper than the Abyss, higher than the Firmament, piercing as the light of the eye of Ilúvatar, the Music ceased."

[**2**] NARSILION

With Melkor chastened, the remaining Ainur take the opportunity to develop their society on earth. *Narsilion* (the song of the sun and moon) begins with a depiction of "Valmar of many bells," the city home of the Ainur. The Ainur gather on a nearby hilltop to hear Yavanna (the Ainu responsible for all growing things) sing a song that urges the Two Trees of Valinor into being. Yavanna's song [**02:18**], given to the flute, is pandiatonic—it uses only white notes—and only when the trees come to flower is chromaticism unleashed [**04:09**]: the two trees have fruit of gold and flowers of silver, respectively, and these wax and wane in alternation, delineating peaceful days. Melkor, meanwhile, has found an ally to aid in his hitherto failed work of destruction: Ungoliant [**05:31**], a "spider of monstrous form" who ingests light (her music is non-harmonic, sounding only in octaves and unisons). She and Melkor sneak to Valinor during a time of festivity [**07:46**], and—at that moment when the light of the two trees mingles in a kind of misty twilight [**09:14**]—they attack. Ungoliant repeatedly pierces the bark and roots of the trees with her beak and sucks out their light, plunging the known world into darkness.

Yavanna attempts to resuscitate the trees, but is only able to draw a single gold fruit and a single silver flower before the trees die. These last vestiges of light are placed in vessels that are set "to voyage on appointed courses above the girdle of the Earth" as the sun and the moon [**11:45**]. *Narsilion* closes with a reprise of the "Valmar of many bells" music: the Ainur, fearful that Melkor will attack again, raise up mountains to separate their land from the rest of the Earth, and they further obscure the sea route to Valinor with the Enchanted Isles, sources of confusion and bewilderment to unwary mariners.

[**3**] TINÚVIEL

Elves (the effectively immortal "first children" of Ilúvatar) already existed when the Two Trees of Valinor were destroyed. Humans came later. Tinúviel (Sindaric for "nightingale") was Beren's nickname for Lúthien, and the romance of Beren and Lúthien represented the first union of human and elf (their divergent natures are represented in my *Tinúviel* via a set of parallel variations on Rameau's "Rossignols amoureux" and Babbitt's *Philomel*). Lúthien's father was none too pleased by their relationship, and he set Beren an impossible challenge to win Lúthien's hand: Beren must steal a Silmaril (an ancient, magical jewel) from the crown of Morgoth—the Ainu formerly known as Melkor—and bring it back to Doriath, Lúthien's forest home. *Tinúviel* plays out as a series of alternating journeys and songs, with Beren journeying to each next stage of his quest, where he invariably gets into trouble and is delivered by Lúthien's magical singing.

Tinúviel begins with Beren's first journey through the horrors of a haunted valley and his stumbling arrival into Doriath, "grey and bowed as with many years of woe." He happens upon Lúthien dancing and singing (crotales mark her song) and loves her. Now questing for the Silmaril, Beren's second journey [**02:14**] takes him past the Falls of Ivrin; he and his companions are captured and killed one by one, until Beren alone remains. He is saved by Lúthien's arrival on the "swift and tireless" hound Huan (her flight is accompanied by the timpani). Beren and Lúthien make the third journey together [**05:29**], "renewing for a time their joy." But as Beren has still not yet achieved a Silmaril, he steals away to quest again. From afar, he sings a song of farewell (accompanied by the harp). Lúthien, having secretly followed, sings back to him. Together again, their fourth journey is incognito [**09:51**]—he disguised as a wolf, she as a bat. They finally arrive at Morgoth's horrible lair. Lúthien sings and dances seductively at Morgoth's urging (accompanied by the castanets); Morgoth is enchanted and falls "as a hill sliding in avalanche." Beren cuts a Silmaril from his crown and the two attempt escape, but

they are intercepted by Morgoth's hound and Beren is killed. The final journey [**13:06**] is Beren's funeral cortège. Lúthien will not be separated from him, and she appeals to Mandos (the Ainu who decides matters of fate) to return Beren to life. Her wish is granted, but only because the hirtherto immortal Lúthien agrees, in exchange, to assume the fate of all humans, their "gift of Ilúvatar": eventual death (the crotales sound again).

[**4**] EÄRENDIL

Eärendil unfolds in two parallel, successive parts. The first opens in the midst of a great storm, from which Ulmo (the Ainu of water) emerges to instruct Tuor (a man) to seek the hidden city of Gondolin. Gondolin was an ancient elven city that lay in the elevated Vale of Tumladen, encircled by mountains. Tuor's arrival is heralded by echoing trumpets [**02:30**]. He espies replicas of the Trees of Valinor. There is dancing. He marries Idril, the daughter of Gondolin's king, and their son Eärendil is born, whose rocking lullaby [**04:58**] devolves into the destruction of Gondolin (another guest of the city having divulged its location to Morgoth). Tuor and Idril escape with their son, and, now advancing in age, feel the pull of the "deeps of the Sea." They build a great boat and sail to the west, where they come "no more into any tale or song" (their pentatonic valedictory music [**06:23**] is given to the cellos and double basses).

The second part of *Eärendil* follows his parallel life path: he weds Elwing, a refugee like himself. She is descended from the union of Beren and Lúthien, and still possesses the Silmaril that Beren cut from Morgoth's crown. The sea calls to Eärendil: missing his parents, he sets solitary sail [**08:48**] in his ship—Vingilot—to find them. While sailing in the west, he is moved to attain the city of Valinor and plead with the Ainur on behalf of men and elves, since Morgoth's power in those days was great. He is confused by the Enchanted Isles (hear the ghostly mouth sirens), and while journeying, Elwing and

their home are attacked. Elwing "with the Silmaril upon her breast" saves herself by jumping into the sea [**10:31**], from whence Ulmo rescues her (a gesture that covers the entire range of the orchestra). She is turned into a bird and flies to meet Eärendil. Together, they reach Valinor and "Valmar of many bells." Vingilot is hallowed and borne "away through Valinor to the uttermost rim of the world." Sailing forever through the oceans of heaven [**11:42**], Eärendil will remain at Vingilot's helm, adorned with the shining Silmaril as "a watch upon the ramparts of the sky."

REGINA DELUISE

Jeremy Gill The music of American composer, conductor, and pianist Jeremy Gill is celebrated for its emotional breadth and diversity of expression. His vocal music ranges from "vibrant settings" (*Gramophone*) of texts by Blaise Pascal for vocal sextet through "vividly colored" (*The New York Times*), dramatic reworkings of Ancient Greek texts. His orchestral music is "replete with imaginative textures" (*The Dallas Morning News*), and his chamber music possesses, at times, a "trance-like intensity" (*The Boston Musical Intelligencer*). His music is "fresh and clever," and "a compositional tour-de-force" (*American Record Guide*) that reveals "a rapidly shifting exploration of past, present, and future" (*I Care If You Listen*).

Jeremy's music has been commissioned by American Opera Projects, Chamber Music America, the Eastman School of Music, Philadelphia's Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, and the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, to name only a few. He has received major awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, ASCAP, BMI, Chamber Music America, and the League of American Orchestras, and has been awarded residencies at Bogliasco, Copland House, the MacDowell Colony, Villa Schoeck, and Willapa Bay.

Jeremy has enjoyed long-term collaborations with the GRAMMY®-winning Parker Quartet, Chautauqua Opera Company, the Dallas and Harrisburg Symphonies, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, the Chameleon Arts Ensemble of Boston, Philadelphia's Dolce Suono Ensemble, Network for New Music, New York Classical Players, and Market Square Concerts. Flutist Mimi Stillman, oboist Erin Hannigan, clarinetist Chris Grymes, pianists Charlotte Hu and Matthew Bengtson, soprano Robin Johannsen, mezzo Rachel Calloway, baritone Jonathan Hays, and violinist Mandy Wolman have all commissioned, premiered, and/or recorded multiple works of his over many years. Conductors JoAnn Falletta, Miguel

Harth-Bedoya, Dongmin Kim, Stuart Malina, Steven Osgood, Gil Rose, and Jaap van Zweden have led significant premieres of Jeremy's music.

Among Jeremy's major orchestral works are concertos—one each for clarinet, piano four-hands, and string quartet; two for oboe; and the choral fantasy *Before the Wresting Tides* for piano and chorus—as well as symphonies and tone poems. He has composed three chamber operas—setting librettos by Don Nigro, Michael Zand, and Jerre Dye—as well as a collection of orchestral songs setting texts in five languages, and a theater piece—*Ladies' Voices*—setting a text by Gertrude Stein.

Jeremy's corpus of chamber music is extensive, and includes major works for string quartet and oboe quartet; various trios; duos for clarinet, flute, violin, and cello with piano; and major solo works for organ, piano, and viola. His extended song cycle for baritone, *Helian*, sets the poem of the same name by Georg Trakl, and he has composed various other song collections for solo and multiple singers with piano and in chamber settings, illuminating texts by a wide array of writers: Zsófia Bán, Italo Calvino, Anne Carson, Hart Crane, Stephen Dunn, Stephanie Fleischmann, Lucy Miller Murray, Ann Patchett, Edgar Allan Poe, Sappho, William Shakespeare, Walt Whitman. Among his concerted vocal music is *Six Pensées de Pascal*, composed for Philadelphia's virtuoso vocal sextet Variant 6, setting aphoristic texts by the great 17th-century polymath.

Deemed "a fine pianist" by *The New York Times*, Jeremy has appeared as a pianist and conductor in music of his own and by his contemporaries. He has been a featured performer at major U.S. venues including Calderwood Hall (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum), the Kennedy Center, Merkin Hall, National Sawdust, the Mansion at Strathmore, and internationally at the Museo d'Arte Orientale in Genoa, Italy; Old Town Hall in Brno, Czech Republic; the Cockpit Theatre in London, UK; Piano Salon Christophori in Berlin, Germany; and Elvermose and Mantziussalen in Denmark. Jeremy has conducted many world premieres with the Dolce Suono Ensemble, the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia, Network for New Music, the Tactus Ensemble of Manhattan School of Music, and the Washington Square Contemporary Music Society, among others.

Born in Harrisburg, PA in 1975, Jeremy studied oboe, piano, and composition before entering the Eastman School of Music. He received his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania in 2000, and studied internationally at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau (1993) and the Czech-American Summer Music Institute (1999). His principal teachers include Samuel Adler, George Crumb, Robert Lau, Yinam Leef, David Liptak, James Primosch, Jay Reise, George Rochberg, Christopher Rouse, Joseph Schwantner, and Anna Weesner. He edited *A Dance of Polar Opposites*, a theoretical-philosophical work written between 1955–2005 by George Rochberg, published by the University of Rochester Press in 2012.

LIZ LINDER

Gil Rose GRAMMY® Award winner and seven-time GRAMMY® nominee Gil Rose is one of today's most innovative conductors, praised as "amazingly versatile" (*The Boston Globe*) with "a sense of style and sophistication" (*Opera News*). Equally comfortable performing core repertoire, new works, and lesser-known historic symphonic and operatic works, "Gil Rose is not just a fine conductor, but a peerless curator, sniffing out—and commissioning—off-trend, unheralded, and otherwise underplayed repertoire that nevertheless holds to unfailingly high standards of quality. In doing so, he's built an unmistakable, yet indefinable, personal aesthetic" (WXQR).

A leader in American contemporary music, Rose is the founder of the performing and recording ensemble the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, which "brings an endlessly curious and almost archaeological mind to programming… with each concert, each recording, an essential step in a better direction" (*The New York Times*), as well as the founder of Odyssey Opera, praised by The New York Times as "bold and intriguing" and "one of the East Coast's most interesting opera companies."

Since its founding in 1996, the "unique and invaluable" (*The New York Times*) BMOP has grown into the premier orchestra for commissioning, recording, and performing 20th- and 21st-century music. Under Rose's leadership, BMOP has received 17 ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming, was named Musical America's Ensemble of the Year in 2016, and received a 2021 Gramophone Magazine Special Achievement Award for its extraordinary contribution to American modern music. Under Rose's direction, BMOP has appeared at numerous festivals, including the Festival of New American Music (Sacramento, CA), Concerts at the Library of Congress (Washington, DC), and the MATA Festival, as well as Carnegie Hall in New York.

In 2013, Gil Rose broadened his musical vision by founding Odyssey Opera, a company dedicated to eclectic and underperformed operatic works from all eras. Collaborating with an international group of singers and directors, Odyssey has presented more than 35 operas in Boston, featuring innovative, thematically connected seasons. The company has also established itself as a leader in modern opera in the United States, presenting three world premieres and numerous U.S. premieres.

Beyond Boston, Gil Rose keeps a busy schedule as a guest conductor and educator. Equally skilled with both symphonic and operatic repertoires, Rose has led performances by the Netherlands Radio Symphony, the American Composers Orchestra, the National Symphony of Ukraine, the Matsumoto Festival in Japan, the New York City Opera, and the Juilliard Symphony, among others. He has served as the Director of Opera and Sonic Exploration at Artpark in Lewiston, NY, as well as the Artistic Director of the Monadnock Music Festival in historic Peterborough, NH. He is a visionary curator of new music, having inaugurated the Ditson Festival of Music at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art and programmed three seasons for the Fromm Concerts at Harvard.

Along with serving on the faculty at Tufts University and Northeastern University, Rose has also worked with students nationwide at institutions like Carnegie Mellon University, MIT, New England Conservatory, and the University of California at San Diego, among others.

TINA TALLON

A unique institution of crucial artistic importance to today's musical world, the **Boston Modern Orchestra Project** (BMOP) is the premier orchestra in the United States dedicated exclusively to commissioning, performing, and recording music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Founded by Artistic Director Gil Rose in 1996, BMOP has championed the works of composers whose careers span nine decades.

Each season, Rose brings BMOP's award-winning orchestra, renowned soloists, and influential composers to the city's most prestigious halls in a series that offers orchestral programming of unrivaled eclecticism. Musical America's 2016 Ensemble of the Year, BMOP was awarded the 2021 Special Achievement Award from *Gramophone* magazine as "an organization that has championed American music of the 20th and 21st century with passion and panache."

Since its extended quarter-century season celebration, which kicked off in February 2022 at Boston's Symphony Hall, BMOP has inaugurated As Told By; visited Carnegie Hall for its debut performance; and released its 100th recording on BMOP/sound.

BMOP/sound, BMOP's independent record label, was created in 2008 to provide a platform for BMOP's extensive archive of music, as well as to provide widespread, top-quality, permanent access to both classics of the 20th century and the music of today's most innovative composers. BMOP/sound has garnered praise from the national and international press. It is the recipient of a 2020 GRAMMY® Award for *Tobias Picker: Fantastic Mr. Fox* as well as nine GRAMMY® nominations, and its releases have appeared on the year-end "Best of" lists of *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, National Public Radio, *American Record Guide*, *DownBeat*, WBUR, NewMusicBox, and others. Admired, praised, and sought after by artists, presenters, critics, and audiophiles, BMOP and BMOP/sound are uniquely positioned to redefine the new music concert and recording experience. BMOP.org

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Pete Walsh

*principals

Jeremy Gill
Four Legends from The Silmarillion

Producer: Gil Rose
Recording and postproduction engineer: Joel Gordon
SACD authoring: Brad Michel

Four Legends from The Silmarillion is published by the composer, Jeremy Gill. Parts and score are available from the Fleisher Collection of Orchestra Music, Free Library of Philadelphia.

Four Legends from The Silmarillion was recorded May 2nd, 2025 at New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall.

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I remain forever thankful to Lois Grass for her support and encouragement over 30 years, and I am deeply grateful to her children who supported this recording: Martin and Jody Grass's generous lead gift made the premiere performance and recording sessions possible, and Elizabeth Weese's substantial gift through the Grass Family Foundation enabled sound editing and physical production. Additional support came from the Alice M. Ditson Fund, Martin and Lucy Murray, and Conrad Cummings: I heartily thank them all. — Jeremy Gill

Cover image: "Yggdrasill, the Mundane Tree." Copied after the illustration of Yggdrasil in "*Eddalaeren og dens prindelse*" Finn Magnusen. 1824. From the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library.

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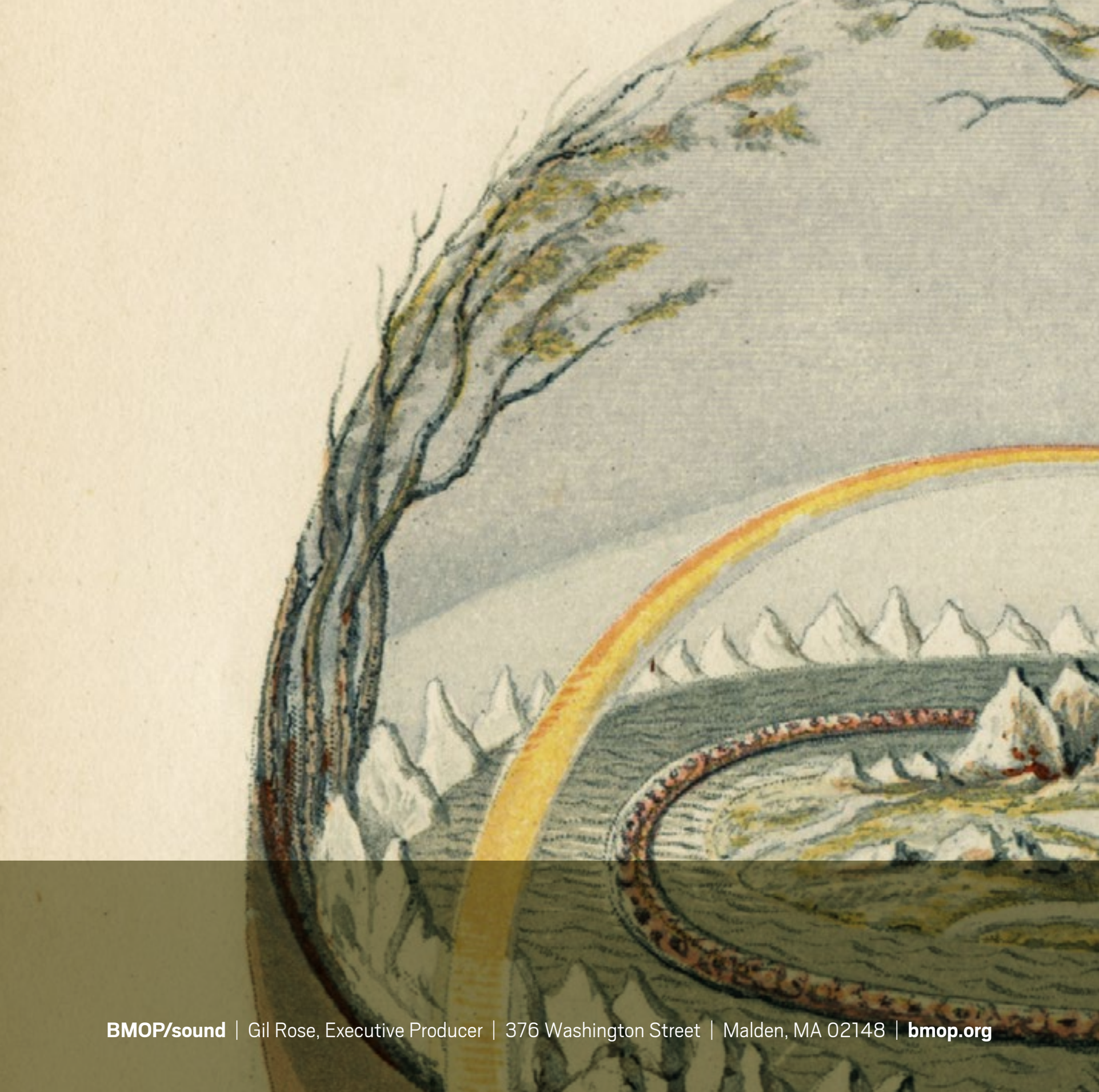

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