



“deeply American and rooted in the mores of Gens X and Y”
—*Time Out New York*

“a veritable D.H. Lawrence of music”
—*New York Classical Review*

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Composer Herschel Garfein’s new album *THE LAYERS* takes imaginative journeys from a rural church in war-torn Bosnia to the Coney Island boardwalk, and features virtuoso performers Sophie Shao, Marnie Breckenridge, Dave Eggar, John Blacklow, Michael Brofman, and Thomas Bagwell. On Spotify, the pre-released single from the album has already garnered 11,000+ streams.

Record label Acis presents three major chamber works by twice-GRAMMY®-winning composer and writer Herschel Garfein. In varied combinations of cello, voice, and piano, *The Layers*, *The Luminous Particular*, and *Three Rides*, explore the crosscurrents of human life in strikingly different ways, inspired by the poetic voices of three very different contemporary poets: Stanley Kunitz, Jane Kenyon, and KC Trommer. The album is produced by the team of multi-GRAMMY®-winning producer Kabir Sehgal, GRAMMY®-nominated cellist Dave Eggar, and Garfein himself.

The Layers [TRACKS 1–3] captures the searching, defiant mood and the Promethean themes of Stanley Kunitz’s eponymous masterpiece. The music was commissioned by prize-winning cellist Sophie Shao (“eloquent, powerful” *The New York Times*), accompanied here by renowned pianist John Blacklow (“capable of the utmost in virtuosity” *Fanfare*). Garfein casts Shao as the musical protagonist who wanders Kunitz’s desolate landscape of years, asking how to reconcile one’s heart to its “feast of losses.” Movement I’s title “scavenger angels” in which Garfein sees “a contradictory fusion of pitiless reality and empathic myth” gives the music sometimes harshly oppositional, sometimes tender qualities. Movement II, “when the moon was covered” is a deeply lyrical song, which Shao plays with rapturous intensity—it has become a standalone hit, reaching 11,000 streams on Spotify in its first month. The virtuosic final movement, “every stone on the road” is set around an original, fast klezmer tune in the unusual meter of 5/4, which Garfein takes through many variations: thunderous musical broadsides, crystalline evocations, an ecstatic waltz. At the concert premiere in September 2022 at Bargemusic, Brooklyn, *The Layers* was praised for “using the poem’s imagery as a touchpoint for fascinating instrumental music...plumbing depths of sadness...[in] an altogether original construction” (*BlogCritics*).

The Luminous Particular [TRACKS 4–8] honors poet Jane Kenyon and her ability to distill brief glimpses of humanity in her life-long pursuit of what she described as “the luminous particular”: that tiny detail that evokes vast realms of “bliss and suffering.” Garfein set Kenyon’s words for acclaimed soprano Marnie Breckenridge (“Bell-like ring over an enormous range and personality spilling from every note” *The Globe and Mail*) who is accompanied by Michael Brofman, the “excellent” (*New York Times*) pianist and founder of the Brooklyn Art Song Society. Kenyon’s work is often considered “wistful and elegiac,” but in choosing these particular texts, Garfein honors a very different, more engaged strain: “I want to find her out in passionate dialogue with the world.” Kenyon leads Garfein around the globe; from the fervent dithyramb “Briefly It Enters and Briefly Speaks,” to the quietude of “Twilight: After Haying,” the nostalgia of “Evening Sun,” and brink of genocide in “Mosaic of the Nativity: Serbia, Winter, 1993.” The cycle’s final song “Otherwise” was previously a stand-alone work—“perfect in its heartfelt simplicity and honesty” (*The Journal of Singing*), “Breckenridge gives lovely voice to this dreamy meditation” (*Opera News*).

Three Rides [TRACKS 9–11], plunges headlong into unusual realms of heightened experience. Setting lyrics by the young poet KC Trommer (Queens, New York), Garfein crafts three brash, compelling narrative songs specifically written for a crackerjack ensemble of virtuosi: soprano Breckenridge, the genre-bending cellist Dave Eggar, and the world-class accompanist/vocal coach Thomas Bagwell. “Composer Herschel Garfein proved a veritable D.H. Lawrence of music in the world premiere of *Three Rides*,” wrote the *New York Classical Review* of the June 2019 concert premiere at Brooklyn Art Song Society. “[The lyrics by] poet KC Trommer... pulsed with imagery linking sex to driving a car on black ice, a roller coaster, and ecstatic brain surgery. Really. Cellist Dave Eggar proved an inspired addition to the voice-and-piano format...Breckenridge left the audience thrilled, and maybe a little stunned at the audacity of it all.”

The album is accompanied by a 24-page full-color booklet which includes the song texts, and program notes by the composer. *The Cyclone* was commissioned by 5 Boroughs Music Festival.

STREET: MAY 16, 2023.

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HERSCHEL GARFEIN's previous album, *Mortality Mansions: Songs of Love and Loss After Sixty* (Delos) was his collaboration with the late US Poet Laureate Donald Hall. It received rapt critical attention. "In this shimmering, expressive song cycle... the verses of the former U.S. poet laureate — at once stately and urgent, rueful and earthy — find a beautiful counterpart in the music of composer Herschel Garfein" (Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*). "*Mortality Mansions* is one of the most deeply moving and impressive vocal works of the 21st century (Gregory Berg, *The Journal of Singing*). "Powerful... glowing... radiant." (Joshua Rosenbloom, *Opera News*). He has composed chamber music, songs, music-theater, dance, and orchestral works. He is an award-winning writer for opera and theater, including the "wildly operatic libretto" (*BBC Music Magazine*) for Robert Aldridge's *Elmer Gantry* for which he and Aldridge won the 2011 GRAMMY® Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition. He also wrote and directed jazz pianist/composer Fred Hersch's *My Coma Dreams*, wrote music and libretto for choreographer Mark Morris's *Mythologies*, and incidental music for Sir Peter Hall's *Troilus and Cressida* (TFNA). He won a second GRAMMY® in 2017 as a producer of Ted Nash's *Presidential Suite: Eight Variations on Freedom*.

CELLIST SOPHIE SHAO, "impressive" (*The Los Angeles Times*) winner of the Avery Fisher Career Grant and prizes at the Rostropovich and Tchaikovsky competitions, is a versatile and passionate artist whose performances have been described as "eloquent, powerful," and "beautifully phrased and interestingly textured," (*The New York Times*) and "deeply satisfying" (*The Washington Post*). Shao's recordings include *Complete Bach Suites*, Andre Previn's *Reflections* on EMI Classics, and Howard Shore's *Mythic Gardens* on Sony Classical.

Hailed for his "powerful and eloquent" performances (*The New York Times*), and "capable of the utmost in virtuosity" (Fanfare), pianist **JOHN BLACKLOW** has been presented at the Kennedy Center in Washington; Carnegie's Zankel Hall; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; in Paris at Salle Gaveau; Berlin's Konzerthaus; The Royal Albert Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall, London; and in Vienna's Musikverein. Blacklow has recorded for Universal, Albany, Bridge, Deutsche Grammophon, and iTunes, and is a Steinway Artist.

Acclaimed opera singer and leading figure in the new music and contemporary opera world, **MARNIE BRECKENRIDGE**, soprano, has sung leading roles worldwide, on opera and symphony stages from London to New York to Tokyo. She won the 2020 DORA award for Outstanding Performance by an Individual for *Jacqueline* (about cellist Jacqueline du Pré). She is known for her deeply poignant character portrayals and has headlined eight world premieres of award-winning new operas and countless art songs by living composers.

Pianist **MICHAEL BROFMAN** has earned a reputation as one of the finest vocal accompanists of his generation. Hailed by *The New York Times* as an "excellent pianist" and recently praised by *Feast of Music* for his "elegant and refined playing... exhibiting excellent touch and clean technique," Mr. Brofman is the founder and artistic director of the Brooklyn Art Song Society, an organization dedicated to the vast repertoire of poetry set to music, now in its thirteenth season.

Cellist **DAVE EGGAR** has been featured soloist on five GRAMMY®-nominated albums. His 2022 duo album with Tasha Warren, *Ourselves Behind Ourselves, Concealed* received two GRAMMY® nominations. He has toured throughout the world as a soloist and composer, including appearances at Carnegie Hall, The Hollywood Bowl, Barbican Centre London, Lincoln Center, and Red Rocks. A virtuoso in many styles, Dr. Eggar has recorded and performed with, and arranged for: Foreigner, Esperanza Spalding, Norah Jones, Lewis Capaldi, Paul Simon, Black Thought, Taylor Swift, Coldplay and many others. A founder of the FLUX string quartet, Eggar is a graduate of Harvard University and the Juilliard School.

THOMAS BAGWELL is a pianist and conductor based in Copenhagen at the Royal Danish Opera. His operatic career includes work at the Metropolitan Opera, the Washington National Opera, the Santa Fe Opera, the Seattle Opera and many others. As a recital accompanist he has performed with such singers as Renee Fleming, Susan Graham, and Marilyn Horne. Mr. Bagwell has been a participant at the Marlboro Music Festival and has toured with Midori. Thomas and Herschel Garfein collaborated on the creation of several new songs for the AIDS Quilt Songbook, which can be heard on the GPR Records recording *An AIDS Quilt Songbook: Sing for Hope*.

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