

eighth blackbird
thirteen ways

eighth blackbird thirteen ways

Molly Alicia Barth

flutes

Michael J. Maccaferri

clarinets

Matt Albert

violin & viola

Nicholas Photinos

cello

Matthew Duvall

percussion

Lisa Kaplan

piano

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JOAN TOWER (arr. Allen Otte)

1 Petroushskates † (1980) (5:49)

GEORGE PERLE

Critical Moments 2* (2001) (11:24)

2 I. ♪ = 120 (1:14)

3 II. ♪ = 104 (1:13)

4 III. ♪ = 88 (2:03)

5 IV. ♪ = 112 (0:51)

6 V. ♪ = 88 (1:19)

7 VI. ♪ = 112 (0:46)

8 VII. ♪ = 44 (1:27)

9 VIII. ♪ = 63 (1:05)

10 IX. ♪ = 126 (1:03)

DAVID SCHOBER

11 Variations* (1998) (9:05)

THOMAS ALBERT

Thirteen Ways* (1997) (28:48)

12 I. Leaden, bleak (2:08)

13 II. Aloof, persistent (1:50)

14 III. Nimble, capricious (2:28)

15 IV. Sensuous, relaxed (3:42)

16 V. Freely, like a birdsong (1:43)

17 VI. Subdued, but urgently (2:42)

18 VII. Exuberant, but increasingly stodgy (1:57)

19 VIII. Steady, rhythmic (2:37)

20 IX. Spacious, detached (2:03)

21 X. Orotund, discordant (1:51)

22 XI. Driving, relentless (2:07)

23 XII. Seamless, expansive (1:56)

24 XIII. Serene (1:39)

† Premiere recording of this arrangement

* World premiere recording

TT: (55:30)

Producer and Engineer: Judith Sherman

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Piano technicians: Ed Court & Ken Eschete

Mastering: Bill Maylone

Recorded:

1 October 3, 2002

Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, Evanston, IL

2-11 July 15 & 16, 2002 / 12-24 July 13 & 14, 2002

Recital Hall of the Performing Arts Center, SUNY Purchase, NY

Front cover photo: Andy Whale/Stone

Photos of eighth blackbird in booklet: Jennifer Girard

Design: Melanie Germond & Pete Goldlust

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PUBLISHER INFORMATION

Joan Tower's Petroushskates

© 1983 Associated Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI) New York, NY

George Perle's Critical Moments 2

(commissioned by the Naumburg Foundation for eighth blackbird)

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David Schober's Variations

© 1998 David Schober

Thomas Albert's Thirteen Ways

(for eighth blackbird)

© 1997 Thomas Albert



DDD
Recorded using 24-bit
digital technology

thirteen ways

notes by eighth blackbird

Strings, winds, and percussion (including piano) have innately different ways of attacking, sustaining, and ending notes and phrases, and therefore composers have an enormous number of choices to consider when composing for the sextet. We chose these four pieces for our debut recording to illustrate that spectrum of compositional possibility: Tom, Joan, David, and George have written these pieces in distinctly varied styles, but all four works share a sense of intimacy. A sense heightened by the act of listening to a CD — when you listen to a recording, you suddenly become an audience of one. There isn't anything quite like listening to music in this way. It doesn't replace the live concert as the ultimate listening experience, but it allows you to become closer to the music



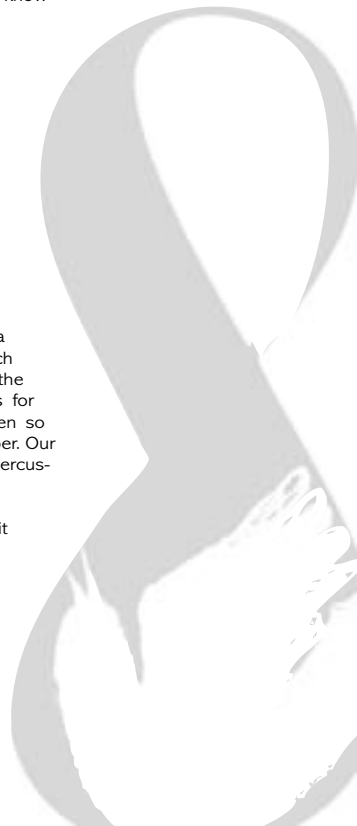
on a more personal level. This CD is comprised of music that strongly resonates with every member of eighth blackbird, so getting to know the music in turn acquaints you with each of us as individuals.

Tom Albert knows us (especially Matt, his son) and our playing styles quite well; for instance, he knows of Matt's love for soaring and meaningful melody, so he incorporated that into many of the movements. He crafted a piece that exploits the low end of the five-octave marimba for Matthew, and he knows that Mike and I have an affinity for blending our sounds to become one. David Schober also knows each of us well — especially his college roommate Matt (what is it with Matt and composers?). I love the opportunity his piece gives us to play with a big, blended orchestral sound — fooling the listener when the flute imperceptibly transforms into the violin, which turns into the cello, and on and on throughout the ensemble. George Perle, a wonderful person whom we met face-to-face for the first time on the day of *Critical Moments 2*'s premiere, has written a piece that forces us to listen to every part of every note that each of us plays, tremendously refining our ensemble skills during the rehearsal process. Recording Joan Tower's *Petroushskates* was for us an opportunity to thank this fabulous woman who has been so instrumental in paving the way for new music ensembles to prosper. Our sextet version of this shimmering soundworld incorporates a percussion part, written by our friend and mentor Allen Otte.

None of these pieces is long or drawn-out; each says what it needs to in a poignant and meaningful way, and then moves on. The various colors and harmonies of each work feed off of and complement one another. We thank you for listening, and while you are — hopefully for the tenth time — please drop us a line or two.¹ It's listening, thinking, feeling, and responding that keeps us, and all new music, going. Thanks for doing your part.

— Molly Alicia Barth

¹ eighth blackbird's contact information can be found at its website, www.eighthblackbird.com



Born in 1938, Joan Tower is at the forefront of today's contemporary music scene. In addition to commissions from nearly every major orchestra in the United States and several around the world, she has received grants from the Guggenheim and Koussevitsky Foundations, among others. A pianist as well as a composer, she was a founding member of the 1972 Naumburg Award-winning Da Capo Chamber Players. She is currently the Asher Edelman Professor of Music at Bard College, where she has taught since 1972.

In her own words...

In an attempt to understand why figure skating, especially pair skating, was so beautiful and moving to me I discovered a musical corollary I had been working on for a while — the idea of a seamless action. (Skating, of course, has no seams unless you stop!) I also always loved Petroushka and wanted to create an homage to Stravinsky and that piece in particular. As it turned out, the figure skating pairs became a whole company of skaters, thereby creating a sort of musical carnival on ice. The “carnival” idea is further heightened in this arrangement of the piece as a sextet with percussion. The percussion part works well because Allen’s arrangement is subtly done, and Matthew plays it with taste and deference to the other parts. I think it does create a slightly different piece — but mostly one that has been enhanced by the percussion, rather than distracted by it.

— **Joan Tower**

In our words...

Lisa: *The summer of 1997 was the first eighth blackbird spent together. We had put together audition tapes and sent them to various summer music festivals. Amazingly, we got into them all — not bad considering we knew how to play a total of four pieces. One of those was Noon Dance by Joan Tower. We knew that Joan was one of the composers in residence at the Norfolk Festival in Connecticut and we were thrilled at the possibility of playing her piece for her.*

Nick: *Since it was our first summer at Norfolk, we were there as students (i.e., we paid to go). At that point we had hung out with Joan a little bit, but didn't really know the depth of her coolness, when we asked her to listen to us play through Noon Dance. So we were a bit*

nervous — we didn't know what she was going to think.

Lisa: *I'll never forget that day in July. All six of us were crammed into the shed annex with its noisy air conditioner, friendly mice, and out-of-tune upright piano. Joan sat about two feet away from us as she closed her eyes and listened to us play.*

Nick: *When we were done, she was silent for some time. She first said, “Wow,” and then made a comment that I remember well, but not precisely. She said that I had actually made the cello solo sound good — she had never been very pleased about how she had composed it and thought that it just would never really work. Suffice it to say this made me very happy.*

Lisa: *She had tears in her eyes, and told us the reason she hadn't immediately agreed to listen to us play Noon Dance was that she had never really been comfortable with the work. But she said our performance that day had changed her mind about the piece.*

Nick: *Since then, how could we not have gotten along with her famously? And how could we not include a work of hers on our first commercial release?*

— **Lisa Kaplan & Nicholas Photinos**

Petroushkates flies by.

Stravinsky and Fleming have

Pulitzer Prize-winning composer and MacArthur Foundation fellow, George Perle was born in 1915 in Bayonne, New Jersey. He was among the first American composers to be influenced by the revolutionary transformation in the language of music embodied in the work of Arnold Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School. From his first encounter with this technique in the summer of 1937, he subjected it to a radical reinterpretation that he calls “12-tone tonality,” which is still the basis of his own musical language. Along with his many compositions, which are widely performed and recorded, Perle has written seven books, including a two-volume study of the operas of Alban Berg. He lives with his wife in New York City and Richmond, Massachusetts.

In his own words... *The instrumentation of these nine short, self-contained, and strikingly individual movements for six players corresponds to that of Pierrot Lunaire, except for the substitution of a percussion part for the quasi-spoken (Sprechstimme) vocal part of Schoenberg's work. I had taken much pleasure in the composition of a set of six such pieces in 1995–96, and was already strongly inclined to undertake such a project again when an unexpected commission from the Naumburg Foundation gave me an opportunity to do exactly that for eighth blackbird. The nine movements range in duration from 45 seconds to 2 minutes, and there are quite definite structural details in many of the pieces that make their brief duration seem exactly right. But I don't think I should get into this in the program note — it sort of misrepresents the compositional process, which feels much more intuitive. Above all, I would say, each piece has its own “expression,” in the sense in which Emerson uses that word in his essay, The Poet: “Every line we can draw in the sand, has expression.”*

— **George Perle**

In our words... Yes, I'll have a Citron martini, desert dry, up, with a twist, shaken gingerly. He'll have the same. Thank you.

As I was saying, Critical Moments 2 came to life in quite an unexpected way. As part of our Naumburg prize in 2000, we were awarded a commission by a composer

of our choice. Thrilled at this opportunity, we sent in a list of composers we were interested in at the time, all of whom were rejected by the foundation.

Excuse me, I said DESERT dry. This tastes like an oil slick.

“Not American. Already received a Naumburg commission. Never heard of them. She's working on an opera and won't be able to write until 2010.” Obviously, we hadn't understood the criteria correctly. Before we had time to create a new list, we got word that the foundation had already commissioned George Perle on our behalf.

Um hi, I said a twist; these are OLIVES.

Imagine our control-freak-y chagrin. A few of us in the group had heard his music before and were shocked by how dramatically different it was from the majority of our repertoire at the time. We had been heading in a distinctly non-academic direction focusing on composers closer to our generation.

[Sigh] Getting closer, I'm not quite sure HOW you confused “Citron” for “Peppar” but I'm SURE you'll get it right this time.

With no option for discussion, we kindly thanked the foundation. Now at the time, we were skeptical, but also intrigued: hesitant because George is considerably older and stylistically unlike most of the composers we had commissioned at that point in our career, yet curious about what such a renowned and expert craftsman might come up with.

There we go. FABULOUS.

We got the parts, rehearsed, performed, and recorded it, and you know what? We're thrilled with this piece. Each movement is such a microcosm of counterpoint and harmony, with every note serving its own specific purpose and direction. It's a wonderful complement to the rest of the disc — I recommend putting your CD player on shuffle and letting your ears and mind do a little dance.

Kind of like I feel like doing with this excellent martini. You know, the bartenders here are really underrated....

— **Michael J. Maccaferri**

**We first met George Perle
on the day of the premiere:
but he was so kind.**

David Schober (b. 1974) is currently a doctoral candidate and a fellow at the University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities in Ann Arbor. During his undergraduate studies at the Oberlin Conservatory, he received a Theodore Presser Foundation grant to study at Yonsei University in South Korea. National recognition for his composition work has included two BMI Student Composer Awards, an ASCAP Foundation Morton Gould Young Composer Award, the San Francisco State University Wayne Peterson Composition Prize, an Aaron Copland Award, and a Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has received commissions from the Minnesota Orchestra, the Naumburg Foundation (for the Miró String Quartet), the BMI Foundation/Carlos Surinach Fund, eighth blackbird, and violinist Gregory Fulkerson. His current project is a Fromm Foundation commission for a concerto for eighth blackbird to be premiered with the American Composers Orchestra in 2004.

In his own words...

I'm not sure what to tell you about the "variations" — it's true that there's no theme, and what variation does occur concerns a harmonic unit, primarily, a "motive" only in the general Schoenbergian sense of the Grundgestalt. The harmony is filled in with Messiaen's Mode 3 (of which the five-note group is a subset) and a dash of Mode 2 (octatonic)... I've never analyzed Knussen's Variations for solo piano in detail, but that piece was a strong influence in terms of gesture and variation technique (i.e., distinct but linked "units" — hardly conventional variations — each recomposing out a basic cell, but not necessarily thematic). That Grundgestalt — A C E B₁ — is a first cousin once removed from mine, a subset of both Mode 2 and Mode 3. Knussen's piece is more subtle and seamless, clearly with expressive goals different from mine, but a fascinating work.

— **David Schober**

In our words...

Dave and I lived together for two years, sharing a dorm room at Oberlin. We both worked most of the time, but I tended to start earlier and Dave continued later. One evening, I remember Dave working on a composition assignment around the time I was going to bed. I wandered over to the little card table he had set up for composing and looked over his shoulder at a diagram filled with chords he had propped vertically in front of him. I was tired, but interested, so I asked him about the chords. He explained the process he was using, and how it was generating the pitches for the piece he was working on. I'm not too bad with theory myself, but as usual at least part of his explanation went over my head. So after letting him explain for about five minutes, I interrupted him, saying, "Well, it's all just random notes anyway." There was a beat, and then Dave burst out laughing. After a moment, so did I.

Now, years later, somehow those notes of his don't seem so random anymore.

— **Matt Albert**

Variations is
much more interesting than
most variations.

Thomas Albert was born in 1948 in Lebanon, Pennsylvania and educated at Barton College and the University of Illinois. His music has been performed throughout the United States as well as in Europe, Brazil, Japan, and Korea. Two of his works, *A Maze (With Grace)* and *Devil's Rain*, have been a part of the repertoire of Philadelphia's Relâche Ensemble for many years, and are included on the group's CD, *On Edge*. Other recent commissions include incidental music for the University of Cincinnati's production of *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*, *The Devil's Handyman* for Washington D.C.'s 20th Century Consort, and a new work for The Folger Consort. He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Charles Ives Center for American Music, and ASCAP. He is currently the Associate Dean of the Conservatory and Professor of Music in composition and music theatre at Shenandoah University.

In his own words...

I started the piece with the eighth way because it had a definite musical reference (and more obviously because it was the inspiration for the group's name). So: noble accents, inescapable rhythms . . . what exactly do those mean? The first idea that came to me was how the simple rhythm of the accompaniment of McCartney and Lennon's "Blackbird" really propels the song — and does that make it an inescapable rhythm? I thought so. Noble accents . . . I don't know if they're noble or not, but the piano constantly interjects accented cluster chords and accented 4-note groups. Both the chords and the 4-note groups are intervallically related to melodic gestures in the "Blackbird" accompaniment. Once that movement was done, I had to find the "hook" for each of the others. The imagery of the poems is very strong, I think, and often visual. I believe my approach to music composition is frequently visually stimulated (in that I might "see" a musical formal correspondent to visual art, or even dramatic art).

The aspect of each poem that "translated" into music for me was different: for some poems, it was a direct depiction of the imagery — almost like underscoring for a film, without the film. For others, the poem merely suggested some musical gesture or form.

Finally, a word about overall form. I am fascinated by the Fibonacci series, a numerical pattern in which each number is the sum of the previous two: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21.... There are 13 poems in the set (a Fibonacci number); the group takes its name from the eighth poem (a Fibonacci number). I had originally thought I would somehow connect the first, second, third, fifth, eighth, and thirteenth movements, but that didn't happen. The first, fifth, eighth, and thirteenth all contain some references to "Blackbird," but the second and third do not. Some things just don't work out. However, each movement has a Fibonacci number of measures (13 or 21 or 34 or 55), and many of the movements have rhythmic or formal schemes based on the series in some way.

— **Thomas Albert**

In our words...

I hadn't really attributed any particularly personal connections to the poems. Everyone always imagines their own visuals, etc., especially after so many performances and hearing the poems so many times, but still, it was never a personal connection. Recently, though, I was reading Operating Instructions by Anne Lamott. It's basically a journal of her baby's first year, and the entry dated Nov. 3 reads:

He laughed today for the first time, when Julie from upstairs was dangling her bracelets above his head while I was changing his diaper. His laughter was like little bells. Then there was the clearest silence, a hush, before total joyous pandemonium broke out between Julie and me. Then we both stared almost heartbrokenly into his face. I thought of Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," verse five —

**I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.²**

I've never known what to think of that poem, really. But now I think it will always have that association, because it's so relevant.

You have to forgive the one-track mind of an expectant father.

— **Matthew Duvall**

[Eva Marguerite Duvall was born March 4, 2003]

Haikus by
Nicholas
Photinos

There may be Thirteen

Ways to look at a blackbird.

² From *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year* by Anne Lamott, copyright © 1993 by Anne Lamott, p. 99. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

by Wallace Stevens

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI

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

VII

O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

eighth blackbird thanks...

— our families and loved ones —

Phillip, Bill, Mike, Yasuko, Margret, and Eva

Joe and Bambi Barth

Peter, Judy, Jill, and Noelle Maccaferri

Tom, Nancy, and Elizabeth Albert

Janet, Stefanie, and Anna Maria Photinos

Bob, Judy, Chris, and Andrew Duvall, and John and Betty Kay

Ken, Lorraine, and Eli (you're the best! – LK) Kaplan

•

our amazing recording guru, Judy, and her intrepid assistant, Hsi-Ling.

•

Ursula for listening to us when we don't sound our best,
so that we can play for others when we do.

•

Joan Panetti (JP!), who believed in us from the very beginning, gave us our first chance at a contemporary music festival, and has been a source of never-ending support and love ever since.

•

Margaret and Nicole, for managing our career with equal parts grace and tenacity,
from the concert stage through this recording and onward.

— from molly —

the audience at Harbin Hot Springs, who truly applauded from their hearts.
There is nothing more special to a performer than that.

•

— from michael —

the friendly flight attendant from SF to Chicago who brought me two bottles of champagne because they didn't have my vegetarian meal.

•

— from matt —

the Chinese restaurant in Stamford, Connecticut that made
the best tofu orange not-chicken I've ever had.

•

— from nick —

our fans, first and foremost, and all the people at Oberlin,
the University of Cincinnati, and Northwestern University
that have helped us along the way (you know who you are!)

•

— from matthew —

Tim Weiss, James Tocco, and Chris Crowley.

Without you we wouldn't have started playing, gotten the opportunity
to rehearse full-time, or gone to the CAG finals in 1998, respectively.

•

— from lisa —

Burton Hatheway, whose wisdom and insight over the years have made me not just a better musician,
but a better person. It is an honor just to know you and call you my friend.
Also thanks to JB for being a constant source of love and laughter.

•

— and from all of us —

thanks to Starbucks (all of them!), the Mandarin, Thai Express,
the Whole Foods in Greenwich, Connecticut, and especially
the former Mary's of Oberlin, Ohio, the setting of our
"let's form this ensemble for real" breakfast (love those biscuits and gravy!)
from which everything else has sprung.

eighth blackbird

Hailed as ambassadors of new music, eighth blackbird has earned a growing reputation for its astounding musical versatility and for its dedication to the works of today's composers. Ensemble-in-residence at the University of Chicago, the sextet was honored in 2000 with the prestigious Naumburg Chamber Music Award and the first BMI/Bouldleaux-Bryant Fund Commission. It has also received commissioning grants from Chamber Music America, Meet the Composer, and the Greenwall Foundation, adding works by Randolph Coleman, Daniel Kellogg, Jennifer Higdon, and Derek Bermel to its repertoire. Recipient of the 1998, 2000, and 2002 CMA/ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming, eighth blackbird became the first contemporary ensemble to win first prize at the Concert Artists Guild International Competition (1998). In 1996, the year of its founding at the Oberlin Conservatory, eighth blackbird was awarded first prize at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition and, in 1997, received top honors at the Coleman Chamber Music Competition.

The current season (2002–2003) sees eighth blackbird performing at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.; the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; Salt Lake City; UCLA; the University of Texas at Austin; and the Eastman School of Music. Past seasons have included performances at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall, the 92nd Street Y, Columbia's Miller Theater, the Metropolitan Museum, the Library of Congress, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the La Jolla Chamber Music Society. The ensemble has also performed in San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Mexico City, among many other cities, and has toured South Korea. Reviewing its New York debut at Merkin Concert Hall during the 1998–99 season, *The New York Times* called eighth blackbird a "superb contemporary music sextet."

The sextet has also appeared at numerous festivals, including the Rockport Chamber Music Festival, the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival, the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, the Caramoor International Music Festival, the Chautauqua Music Festival, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, and Cincinnati's MusicX. The ensemble has been featured on "CBS Sunday Morning"

with Eugenia Zukerman, and was the focus of a symposium on new music at the American Symphony Orchestra League's annual conference in 1999, where it also performed. eighth blackbird is active in teaching young artists about contemporary music and has taught master classes and conducted outreach activities in the art of contemporary performance and interpretation. The ensemble has performed educational outreach at the Aspen Music School (grades K–12), the La Jolla Chamber Music Series, the Candlelight Concert Series, and Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa.

Several eminent composers, most notably Frederic Rzewski and George Perle, have dedicated works to eighth blackbird. The ensemble's extensive repertoire includes works by many of the great composers of our time, including Michael Torke, George Crumb, Aaron Jay Kernis, Paul Moravec, John Harbison, Joan Tower, and *Bang on a Can's* David Lang, as well as ground-breaking works by emerging composers David Schober, Daniel Kellogg, Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez, and the Minimum Security Composers' Collective.

Each of the members of eighth blackbird holds a Bachelor's degree in performance from the Oberlin Conservatory, an Artist Diploma in chamber music from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, and a Master's degree in performance from the Northwestern University School of Music. eighth blackbird derives its name from the Wallace Stevens poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird."

Thirteen Ways marks eighth blackbird's commercial recording debut. The group will release a second CD with Cedille Records, featuring music of Daniel Kellogg (*Divinum Mysterium*) and George Crumb (*Vox Balaenae*), in 2004. A third Cedille disc, devoted to works by Frederic Rzewski, will be released in 2005. In 1999, the ensemble self-released its CD titled *Round Nut Tool*, which is available directly from eighth blackbird.

Please visit
www.eighthblackbird.com
for more information about the ensemble.



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piano

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flutes

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