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**EXCELSIOR**

FIFTH HOUSE ENSEMBLE

**ÇEDILLE**

**Producer** Judith Sherman

**Engineer** Bill Maylone

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**CEDILLE**  
9:

**24 BIT  
DIGITAL  
RECORDING**

## **EXCELSIOR** FIFTH HOUSE ENSEMBLE

**ALEX SHAPIRO (b. 1962)**

1 **Perpetual Spark (2011) (6:53)\*** — *Arranged for Fifth House Ensemble*

Melissa Snoza, flute; Andrew Williams, violin; Clark Carruth, viola; Herine Coetzee Koschak, cello  
Eric Snoza, bass; Jani Parsons, piano

**JESSE LIMBACHER (b. 1991)**

2 **Air (2012) (6:09)\*** — *Written for and premiered at the 2012 fresh inc festival*

Crystal Hall, oboe; Jennifer Woodrum, clarinet; Karl Rzasa, bassoon

**MASON BATES (b. 1977)**

**Red River (2007) (19:23)**

3 **I. The Continental Divide (4:20)**

4 **II. Interstate 70 (3:54)**

5 **III. Zuni Visions from the Canyon Walls (4:38)**

6 **IV. Hoover Slates Vegas (3:49)**

7 **V. Running Dry on the Sonoran Floor (2:48)**

Jennifer Woodrum, clarinet; Andrew Williams, violin; Herine Coetzee Koschak, cello;  
Jani Parsons, piano

**CALEB BURHANS (b.1980) / JOHN COLETTI, librettist**

**NEWMUSIC**  
USA

8 **Excelsior (2012) (30:57)\*** — *A New Music USA commission*

Martha Cluver, soprano; Melissa Snoza, flute; Crystal Hall, oboe; Jennifer Woodrum, clarinet  
Karl Rzasa, bassoon; Matt Marks, horn; Andrew Williams, violin; Clark Carruth, viola  
Herine Coetzee Koschak, cello; Eric Snoza, bass; Jani Parsons, piano; Caleb Burhans, electric  
violin; Grey McMurray, electric guitar

**TT: (64:00)**

**\*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

## PERPETUAL SPARK

ALEX SHAPIRO

This piece was inspired by the life, love, energy, and heart of Dale Mara Bershad, a gifted musician who often used her talents to share the joy of expression and wonder with young children. As a mother, teacher, and performer, Mara's remarkable inner light cast an indelible glow. Her essence remains radiant and present: a spark from a life filled with passion and delight, burning brightly, intensely, and without end.

### FIFTH HOUSE ENSEMBLE

*Perpetual Spark*, scored for piano, strings, and flute/piccolo, began as a piano solo; and indeed, the piano plays a crucial role in establishing the rich harmonies and sparkling texture that make this work truly spectacular. The addition of strings and flute creates a new dimension — a sense of propulsion and lift in the sound inherent to Shapiro's style, that can only be described as exhilarating. *Perpetual Spark's* opening section highlights a florid sixteenth-note pattern in the pianist's right hand,

repeated and manipulated to create a constantly changing harmonic landscape against longer melodic gestures in the left hand, and in the strings and flute. This gives way to an expressive middle section marked by calm repose while simultaneously reaching forward in all instruments. My favorite marking in the score, "the spark still remains...", occurs as the first section's texture returns with an explosion of energy to the finale, bursting with a surging light that is never to be extinguished.

— Jani Parsons

## AIR

JESSE LIMBACHER

My reed trio is an essay on the plurality of meaning, musical and otherwise, inherent in the word "air." The piece explores our most human uses of air in terms of breathing, speaking, and singing. As such, it incorporates the sounds of pure air and veiled human speech as well as instrumental lines and textures. The "journey" of the work can be heard as a gradual struggle from primordial mystery communicating many of the

purest human actions and emotions, including fear, ecstasy, song, and dance. Listeners are encouraged to open their ears to the music in all of its sounds and to experience the piece, as a whole, as a life-affirming expression of the human condition.

### FIFTH HOUSE ENSEMBLE

We premiered Jesse Limbacher's *Air* as part of the **fresh inc** festival in June 2012. Working on the piece was like nothing we had ever done before as a trio. The process of exploring the effects in *Air* truly made me feel as if I had taken up a new instrument, quickly going between key clicks, traditional singing sound, whispering with speaking voices, blowing air, and speaking with heavily articulated percussive syllables. We all fell in love with this piece. It takes the listener on a journey of sound from air to lyrical singing.

— Jennifer Woodrum

## RED RIVER

MASON BATES

Combining a chamber ensemble with the rhythmic power and drama of electronics, *Red River* traces the journey of the great Colorado River to its various destinations in the Southwest — Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon, the California desert — where its overuse is a source of endless controversy. Perhaps no body of water better illustrates the age-old confrontation of humankind and nature than the great Colorado, whose very name embodies this struggle. Its early designation as Red River was a nod to the rich color arising from its special silt, which ultimately ended up trapped behind various dams erected along its way. The name was changed to pay homage to the river's source, high up in the Colorado Rockies at the Continental Divide — and that is where this work begins.

The piece begins high up in the Rockies at the Continental Divide as various streams accumulate into a

formidable body of water. Quicksilver figuration in the piano is echoed by the other instruments, and the electronica beats move from ambient trip-hop to energetic drum 'n bass. These various musical streams unite in "Interstate 70," an epic American freeway that parallels the Colorado through the State of Utah, and the electronics disappear as the ensemble falls into a bumpy and capricious ride.

As we arrive at the central, lyrical "Zuni Visions," we find ourselves floating high above the river in the red rocks of Arizona's Grand Canyon. The Zuni Indians once lived in caves up in the walls of the Canyon, and the atmospheric electronics and bending clarinet melody imagine us looking down at the river with them. This ponderous movement ends abruptly with the arrival of enormous machinery. The ensuing "Hoover Slates Vegas" uses all manner of industrial beats in the electronics to conjure the building of the Hoover Dam — the great sink of Las Vegas — with a nod to the razzle-dazzle of that thirsty city. Exhausted by all of this human activity, the river (and

the piece) moves to its final resting place, the huge Sonoran Desert in southeastern California. The trickles of the opening have now run dry, and all we are left with is the buzzing of a Sonoran cricket amidst the vast emptiness of the desert.

## **EXCELSIOR**

CALEB BURHANS

In an attempt to test both technological advances and human limitations, the United States Air Force began experiments in 1958 to design parachute systems that would allow for high-altitude ejection from planes. The third and final test, *Excelsior III*, occurred on August 16, 1960, when Joseph Kittinger began a free fall from 102,800 feet. After 4 minutes and 36 seconds of free fall, Kittinger's main parachute opened at 17,500 feet, allowing him to land safely on Earth's surface. *Excelsior* takes this important event in history and explores its impact on the human psyche. The relativity of time allows this four-minute jump to be experienced through a 30-minute multi-media work.

## *FIFTH HOUSE ENSEMBLE*

From the first reading of this piece, our ensemble unanimously fell in love with *Excelsior*. The writing is boldly minimalist, challenging each of us to play our acoustic instruments with the rhythmic, technical, and pitch accuracy of a sophisticated keyboard instrument. I find myself blissfully floating off into other worlds and dimensions during some my long periods of rest, only to abruptly "snap out of it" for my next entrance. It's like Mozart in that it's either right or wrong and there's nothing in between; and then at times, as you groove in perfect rhythmic synchrony with the violin, you feel as though you are on stage with members of Pink Floyd.

It was a joy to have the entire ensemble on stage premiering this fantastic work with *itsnotyouitsme* and Martha Culver. Special thanks go to those who carried out all of the behind the scenes work that went into making the notes appear on the paper in front of us.

— Jennifer Woodrum

## TEXT

In broken crib. tape, your arm  
rocked of moving and  
closed it again  
lacked so lowingly  
solid water all receiving  
yellow elms scattered in mobile arrays  
an antique light  
come to staring ridge  
of mercy. practicing simple breathing  
beads of sweat, floating pupil  
moth staggers goes out  
slipping down bolt-shattered  
eye trails. a hill of salt  
snap to will  
eleven cue balls misaligned  
powered by, switch  
pillow, points, face-planting  
cannot connect  
cannot connect

## FIFTH HOUSE ENSEMBLE

Praised by *The New York Times* for its “conviction, authority, and finesse,” Chicago-based Fifth House Ensemble is defined by its limitless imagination and energy and an insatiable desire to bring transformative performance experiences to audiences of all types. Having pioneered the art of narrative chamber music with its signature series *Black Violet*, *The Weaver’s Tales*, *In Transit*, and *Caught*, 5HE’s cross-media projects fuse elements as diverse as physical theatre, graphic novels, and community-based storytelling. With humor and joy, 5HE breathes life into repertoire both established and emerging, equally at home on the most prestigious stages and unexpected venues including aquariums, train stations, and bars.

Recent seasons have included performances at the Ravinia Festival, Miller Theatre, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and live broadcasts on Chicago’s WFMT. Currently in residence at Carthage

College and DePauw University, the ensemble presents performances and training programs at universities and conservatories nationwide including the Eastman School of Music, Yale, Indiana University, and New England Conservatory.

The ensemble has premiered and performed works by contemporary composers including Caleb Burhans, Kevin Puts, David T. Little, Mason Bates, JacobTV, and John Zorn. In 2012, 5HE launched the annual summer **fresh inc** festival, presenting 16 new works of chamber music by composers under age 32.

In addition to its work on the concert stage, 5HE began presenting curriculum-integrated residencies for students grades K–12 within its first season, exploring links between chamber music and language arts, social studies, and science. 5HE now collaborates with the International Music Foundation,

Ravinia’s Reach\*Teach\*Play program, Communities in Schools Chicago, and the Illinois Arts Council to present these programs in Chicago Public Schools.

