

Patrice Michaels

On the Joys of Recorded Music



AN ADDENDUM TO
Notorious
RBG in Song

CEDILLE
:

Bachtell

On the Joys of Recorded Music (3:31)

Music by Patrice Michaels
to a text by Justice David H. Souter

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

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from the Ruth Bader Ginsburg Fund for Vocal
Recordings at Cedille Records*



On The Process of Releasing a Song

by Patrice Michaels

What to do when the author of a letter that you've already set to music refuses permission to publish?

This was the problem I faced quite unexpectedly in 2017, just a few months before my song cycle about RBG was scheduled to be recorded as the anchoring composition for the album that became *Notorious RBG in Song*, with Kuang-Hao Huang at the piano and me singing the pieces that comprise my cycle, *THE LONG VIEW: A Portrait of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Nine Songs*.

In 1999, Supreme Court Justice David H. Souter wrote a perfectly lovely thank-you note to James Ginsburg, expressing gratitude for a particular recording he had received from his pal, RBG. The album that so moved him was Rachel Barton Pine's 1997 debut on Cedille Records: her CD of the complete Handel

Violin Sonatas. Souter's suggestion that Cedille's bottom line might be negatively impacted by James' mother's liberal gifting of CDs was a droll joke — a foil for his sincere and profound expression of appreciation for Ms. Pine's recorded interpretations.

As the song cycle about my mother-in-law and those whose lives she affected came together, this letter was an obvious gem, tying together so many aspects of her life, both familial and collegial. I also loved it for Souter's stunned conversion to the possibility that a recorded performance might have the power to evoke emotion in the listener just as much as a live performance would. And, of course, it was terrific that his thanks for this creation were being offered to the recording's producer, who was my colleague in 1999, but by 2017 was my very own husband.

As Justice Souter had been off the bench for some years already, I didn't worry when my first request for permission went unanswered. I sent another a few months later. On my third try, I finally found a circuitous route to him through a former secretary. When his response arrived, I was dumbstruck: due to his lifelong commitment to avoiding any publication that might result in monetary gain, he would have to refuse.

I put "On the Joys of Recorded Music" in the drawer, remembering how many composers were similarly disappointed when they failed to gain the rights to desired texts. I wrote a new piece for the song cycle about a Very Young James, concerning his elevator thievery and his mother's insistence that the school administrators who took James' latest prank so very seriously should explain the gravity of this transgression to the boy's *father* — for a change — and not to her.

Justice Souter passed away in 2025. Rights to the letter now belong to the recipient rather than the author. The drawer has opened, and we now have a stand-alone piece, or a coda to the cycle, as you please. The irony of Justice Souter's response still makes me chuckle — he clearly had no idea that making classical music is anything *but* gainful for most of us — and I treasure the experience of giving breath to this song, at last.

Supreme Court of the United States
Washington, D. C. 20543

CHAMBERS OF
JUSTICE DAVID H. SOUTER

March 16, 1999

Dear Mr. Ginsburg:

If the day ever comes that you wonder why you are not making more money from your recording enterprises, the answer will probably lie at your mother's doorstep, for she has been depressing your bottom line by her generosity. Since she learned recently that I had received a CD player as a gift, she has given me three of your CDs. Each has brought much pleasure, but the most recent of the three, Rachel Barton's recording of the Handel violin sonatas, is so splendid that I have to go beyond thanks to your mother and get directly to you.

My musical taste tends to the antique, and I knew I would enjoy hearing the Handel pieces again, but I wasn't prepared for what I got. Ms. Barton's playing is nothing short of thrilling, and I use the adjective carefully. I don't know when I have been so affected by any performance, let alone a recorded one. Her authority left me just about speechless. I hope it's true that CDs don't wear out, because that one is going to get a lot of playing over the years.

Hence this note of congratulations on producing such splendid things. Break a leg.

Yours sincerely,

David Souter

“On the Joys of Recorded Music” lyrics

Chambers of the Honorable David H. Souter

Supreme Court of the United States

March sixteenth, Nineteen Ninety-Nine,

Dear Mister Ginsburg,

If the day comes that you wonder
why you're not making more money
from your recording enterprises,
the answer lies with your mother
for she has been depressing your bottom line
by virtue of her generosity.

She has given me three of your CDs.
My musical taste tends to the antique
and I knew I would enjoy the Handel sonatas for violin,
but I wasn't prepared: It is splendid.

I don't know when I've been so affected
by a performance, any performance,
let alone a recorded one.
It is splendid.

I hope it's true that CDs don't wear out
because this one is going to get a lot of playing
over the years.

Hence this note of congratulations
directly to you, Mister Ginsburg.
Splendid!

Yours sincerely, David Souter.



Patrice Michaels

Patrice Michaels writes music with words, favoring themes of social justice and American history. Her cycle, *THE LONG VIEW: A Portrait of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Nine Songs* has received significant critical acclaim, anchoring the nationally touring dramatic concert “Notorious RBG in Song.” Michaels’ choral work, “Refuge,” premiered at the Kennedy Center in July 2019. Commissioned by The National Constitution Center, Lyric Fest of Philadelphia, and the Musicians Club of Women, *RESOLVED: Songs of Women’s Suffrage and the 19th Amendment* debuted in 2020 as an NBC/Peacock video featuring mezzo-soprano J’Nai Bridges. Other Michaels works include incidental music for Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a one-act opera on Euripides’ *The Trojan Women*, and the children’s show *A Song for Harmonica*. She is currently developing the opera *JANE DOE: The Life and Times of Pauli Murray*. Her bilingual

song-set, *Un viaje en la canción/A Journey in Song* is scheduled for publication in spring 2026.

Michaels' vocal virtuosity in both live and recorded performances rank her as "A formidable interpretative talent" (*The New Yorker*), possessing "a voice that is light, rich and flexible" (*Opera News*). Her many recordings (for Albany, Amadis, Cedille, Neos, and Decca) range from baroque chamber concerts, through the groundbreaking and much-lauded *Divas of Mozart's Day*, to explorations of 20th century repertoire and new jazz-inflected classical works. Ms. Michaels' appearances include singing with the Shanghai, Czech National, St. Louis, Atlanta, and Minnesota Orchestras; New York's Concert Royal; and Chicago's Music of the Baroque. She debuted with the Cleveland Opera in *Fidelio*, sang in *Candide* at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and performed in Menotti's *The Medium* with Chicago Opera Theater (live and on Cedille Records). Recitals

include appearances at the Festival of Contemporary Music in Havana, Music at the Supreme Court, Harvard University, and The Schubert Club (St. Paul, MN). She has been a guest clinician at such institutions as the University of Tel Aviv Buchman-Mehta School, Mexico City's Escuela Superior de Musica, and ISA Havana.

Patrice teaches in the Voice/Opera program at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music. She is a graduate of Pomona College and the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, and a diplomate of the Banff Centre (Alberta, Canada).

patricemichaels.com



Alisa Jordheim

Described as “vocally resplendent, “powerful,” and possessing “impeccable coloratura” (*San Francisco Chronicle*), versatile soprano Alisa Jordheim is praised for her compelling and vocally assured performances in opera, concert, musical theatre, new music, early music, and recital.

On the opera stage, she has portrayed a variety of roles including Violetta (*La traviata*), Gilda (*Rigoletto*), Adina (*L’elisir d’amore*), Ninetta (*La gazza ladra*), Musetta (*La bohème*), Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Cunégonde (*Candide*), Venus (*Venus and Adonis*), Belinda (*Dido and Aeneas*), and Lola, a role she created and commercially recorded in the world premiere of Robert Aldridge’s *Sister Carrie*. Ms. Jordheim has appeared with companies including Opéra national de Paris, San Diego Opera, Central City Opera, Palm Beach Opera, Virginia Opera, Atlanta Opera, Cincinnati Opera, the Caramoor

International Music Festival, George Enescu Festival, Florentine Opera, and Teatro Nuovo at Lincoln Center. She is a frequent soloist on the concert stage singing repertoire spanning from Händel's *Messiah* to Mahler's *Symphony No. 4* to Torke's *Book of Proverbs* to musical theatre with ensembles including the Grant Park Orchestra, Thailand Philharmonic, Ensemble Pygmalion, Bochumer Symphoniker, Baltimore Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Pacific Symphony, and New Philharmonic.

Ms. Jordheim has a strong interest in Scandinavian vocal repertoire and frequently performs works by Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish composers in recital. An acclaimed interpreter of Lori Laitman's music, Ms. Jordheim recorded *Five Lovers* with pianist Andrew Rosenblum on the Naxos label and *Fresh Patterns*, a song cycle written for her, with soprano Patrice Michaels and pianist Andrew Rosenblum on the Acis label.

Her recordings of Rami Levin's *Três Canções* and *Four English Songs* can also be heard on Acis.

Ms. Jordheim is an alumna of San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program, Central City Opera's Young Artist Program, Florentine Opera Studio, and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. She is a grand prize winner of the Rose Bampton Award from The Sullivan Foundation, two-time winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council district auditions, and the recipient of a Fulbright Foundation Scholarship and American Scandinavian Foundation Fellowship to study Scandinavian lyric diction and song in Norway.

alisasuzannejordheim.com



Kuang-Hao Huang

Commended for his “perceptive pianism” (*Audiophile*) and “playing that is sensitive and wonderfully warm” (*American Record Guide*), Chicagoan Kuang-Hao Huang is a highly sought-after collaborative pianist whose performances have taken him throughout North America, Europe and Asia. He has performed in Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and Merkin Hall in New York City; in Washington, DC’s Kennedy Center and NPR Tiny Desk; and at every major venue in the Chicago area, including the Harris Theatre and Symphony Center. He is often heard live on WFMT and has also performed on WQXR and Medici.tv. Mr. Huang has recorded for Aucourant, Cedille, Innova and Naxos, including a CD of flute fantasies with flutist Mathieu Dufour, a premiere recording of early songs by Alban Berg with mezzo-soprano Julia Bentley, and a survey of songs by Chicago composers with baritone Thomas Hampson.

Mr. Huang can also be heard with violinist Augustin Hadelich on the official recordings for Suzuki Violin Books 4–6.

A dedicated teacher, Mr. Huang serves on the faculties of the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University and Concordia University-Chicago.

From 2014–2021, Mr. Huang was the driving force behind Make Music Chicago, a citywide celebration of music every June 21st. He also founded the organization’s Pianos in the Parks program, which partners with the Chicago Park District to give all Chicagoans access to outdoor pianos as well as free lessons. Currently, Mr. Huang serves on the Advisory Council for the Make Music Alliance and on the Board of Directors of the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras.

khpiano.net

Credits

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Engineer Bill Maylone

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Score © 2017 Patrice Michaels

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