

A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a maroon suit jacket over a patterned shirt, stands against a solid red background. He is holding a gold saxophone in his right hand and has his left hand near his chest. The overall aesthetic is modern and artistic.

AS WE ARE

JULIAN
VELASCO

SAXOPHONE

WINSTON
CHOI

PIANO

CEDILLE
S

AS WE ARE

STEVEN BANKS (b. 1993)

Come As You Are* (18:07)

for tenor saxophone and piano

- 1 I. Lift My Eyes (5:39)
- 2 II. Times of the Storm (3:23)
- 3 III. Strength of My Life (4:43)
- 4 IV. Lift My Hands (4:14)

DAVID MASLANKA (1943–2017)

5 Tone Studies No. 5: Wie bist du, Seele (4:56)

for alto saxophone and piano

JOHN ANTHONY LENNON (b. 1950)

6 Distances Within Me (11:21)

for alto saxophone and piano

AMANDA HARBERG (b. 1973)

Court Dances† (13:46)

for soprano saxophone and piano

- 7 Courante (3:48)
- 8 Air de Cour (5:34)
- 9 Tambourin (4:18)

WINSTON CHOI PIANO

JULIAN VELASCO

SAXOPHONE

ELIJAH DANIEL SMITH (b. 1995)

10 Animus† (7:37)

for soprano saxophone and electronics

CHRISTOPHER CERRONE (b. 1984)

Liminal Highway† (16:35)

for soprano saxophone and electronics

- 11 I. When you fall asleep in transit (3:04)
- 12 II. A dream you don't recall (3:57)
- 13 III. Between consciousness and sleep (2:33)
- 14 IV. Liminal (3:45)
- 15 V. Suddenly it is missing (3:16)

TT: (73:04)

* WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

† WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING
of version for soprano saxophone

As We Are is made possible in part by the generous support of Ginger and Jimmy Meyer, Lori Julian for the Julian Family Foundation, and other guests at Soirée Cedille 2019

PERSONAL NOTE FROM JULIAN VELASCO

As We Are is the result of a powerful moment of realization I experienced last year. For years, I struggled to fit neatly within a singular description of myself. There are a multitude of identifiers that I ascribed to myself saying, "My identity is a mixture of American, Canadian, and Mexican cultures... classical, jazz, and popular musical backgrounds." However, this list of (well-intentioned) labels felt reductive at best, exclusionary at worst. I frequently found myself unable to answer convincingly the question, "Where do I fit in?"

In April 2021, I watched my friend Steven Banks premiere his new work, *Come As You Are*. In his performance notes, he shared his thoughts about accepting his own plurality as a form of strength and opportunity. That performance and those notes brought me considerable affirmation in my own journey towards individuation. Subsequently, it inspired this collection of music. This album is intended to celebrate not only the different musical aspects of my life at this moment, but also the unique and wonderful people with whom I have been lucky enough to surround myself. It is indeed, "as we are." Thank you for listening.

Thank you to the team that poured countless hours into making this record happen: Bill, Chris, Casio, Julia, Jim, Madeleine, Mike, Jordan, Taimur, Jaclyn, Jerry, and Winston.

Come As You Are is dedicated to Steven. Your work served as a source of power in discovering my own sense of identity at one of the darkest points of my life and I am forever thankful.

Wie bist du, Seele is dedicated to David. Thank you for sharing your patience; you and Alison are missed.

Distances Within Me is dedicated to John and the saxophone mentors to whom I owe my craft. Thank you, Dad, Diego, James, Joe, and Taimur.

Court Dances is dedicated to Amanda and Winston. Thank you for sharing your joy, trust, friendship, and musicianship.

Animus is dedicated to Elijah. Thank you for your endless enthusiasm and eagerness to collaborate on creating new music with me over these past years.

Liminal Highway is dedicated to Chris, Mike, and Tim. Thank you for your inspiration, expertise, and passion to help turn this crazy idea into a reality.

This album is dedicated to my family. None of this would be possible without your undying support.

Sincerely grateful,

JULIAN

PROGRAM NOTES

by Julian Velasco and the composers

COME AS YOU ARE

For several years, I have wanted to write a piece dedicated to my immediate family (my mother and three sisters) and the influence of my upbringing on my understanding of music and life in general. It seemed obvious to me that this piece needed to take influence from African-American church music in some way. In an effort to honor both my family and the church, I decided to write a four-movement work in which each movement would be dedicated to a different family member and take inspiration from their favorite Negro spiritual or sacred song. My mother chose "I Still Have Joy." My three sisters, Kharma, Jennifer, and Ashley, chose "His Eye is On the Sparrow," "My Lord, What a Morning," and "Wade in the Water," respectively.

At its core, *Come As You Are* is an expanded arrangement, or setting, of these four songs. As a more direct reference to the music played in the church that I grew up going to, the song "Total Praise," which is typically sung by a choir, serves as a sort of connective tissue throughout the entire piece. The titles of each movement come from lyrics of "Total Praise." The text of each song is vital to understanding the expressive nature of each movement.

When interpreted through the lens of classical music, these movements are configured in a way that is intended to align with a slightly deviant four-movement sonata form that composers such as Schumann, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich, and many others used in several of their works. In this form, the first movement is an allegro, the second a scherzo or dance, the third an adagio, and the last movement is another fast one, perhaps with a dance feel or including a theme and variations.

Through the lens of African-American sacred music, the first two movements, "Lift My Eyes" and "Times of the Storm," are inspired by traditional Negro spirituals. It is important to note that spirituals often contained text that was Biblical on the surface, yet deeply personal or communicative in intention. "My Lord, What A Morning" and "Wade in the Water" are no exceptions to this tradition. In this spirit, I aimed to strike a balance between the surface-level meaning of these spirituals and what they might have meant for the people who sang them. There may seem to be striking dichotomies in character that are reflective of these varied meanings. The last two movements, "Strength of My Life" and "Lift My Hands," are inspired by songs that are more common in religious practices today. In these, I have tried to make a musical depiction of the lyrics in a way that conveys the message of each song from my perspective.

In many ways, I have experienced all of these aspects of myself finally beginning to merge. As a composer, I strive to let my internal musical voice be "ok" and to follow it where it wanders, trusting that this amalgamation of experiences is leading me in a direction that is uniquely mine and informed by my various interests and identities.

—STEVEN BANKS (MARCH 2020)
STEVEN-BANKS.COM

-tone studies no. 5: wie bist du, seele?

Wie bist du, Seele (Soul, how have you become so unhappy?) is the fifth study from *Tone Studies*, a set of six pieces that are, for the most part, slow and quiet. David remarked of the work:

“I chose the title *Tone Studies* because each movement, and in fact each moment, offers a large number of choices about quality of sound, choices that will evolve with deepening study . . . [and] continue to unfold over time. Each study is a small and passionate essay — a “short story” without words. The original melodies can all be found in the 371 Four-Part Chorales by J.S. Bach. The key for both the pianist and saxophonist is patience — patience with tempi, patience with fermatas, patient and careful listening into tones produced by each instrument and by the two together. This music asks and requires that you listen deeply. When you do, a special settled heart energy arises.”

Tone Studies was commissioned by Joseph and Janet Lulloff for their son, Jordan.

distances within me

In 1974, I was in Bill Bolcom’s composition seminar at the University of Michigan when he and Donald Sinta gathered the saxophone studio together with the composition students to try out ideas for saxophones, from soprano to bass. That day the Michigan Saxophone Quartet was there: James Forger, Lynn Klock, Steven Mauk, and Clifford Leaman. They demonstrated their instruments and answered our questions. Among the composers were Stephen Chatman, Edmond Cionek, and Arthur Gottschalk. Soon after this, I wrote a piece for the School of Music orchestra with an alto part that was performed by Jim Forger.

The sound of the instrument and its vocal quality rang in my ears. In 1978, Jim asked me to compose a piece for the N.A.S.A. saxophone conference at Northwestern University. I worked on this new piece that became *Distances Within Me*. At the time, I was absorbed by the music of Alban Berg, particularly *Wozzeck*, and by popular groups like Return to Forever. These were some of the sounds in my ear at the time.

I wrote *Distances* in Knoxville, where I moved to teach at the University of Tennessee. In those days before computers with music programs, the score was written at the piano and transcribed with ink onto transparent ozalid paper. Copying, as laborious as it was, became part of the creative process that began with listening to the instrument and asking questions about how it worked.

—JOHN ANTHONY LENNON (MAY 2022)
JOHNANTHONYLENNON.COM

court dances

Court Dances was initially inspired by the fast, syncopated bounce of a squash ball and grew into a celebratory three movement suite referencing 16th and 17th century court dances. The first movement, Courante, reflects the lively character and triple meter typical of its Baroque namesake. The lyrical and flowing Air de Cour offers introspective contrast to the more gregarious outer movements. The dynamic final movement, Tambourin, references both the eponymous Provençal dance and French drum through its accents, syncopation, and percussive effects.

Court Dances was commissioned in 2017 by flutist Cobus du Toit as a consortium project supported by 57 co-commissioners from around the world. A few years later, saxophonist Julian Velasco had the idea of making a soprano saxophone version of the work. I collaborated with Velasco during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic to create the new arrangement. This is the world premiere recording of *Court Dances* for soprano saxophone and piano.

—AMANDA HARBERG (MAY 2022)
AMANDAHARBERG.COM

ANIMUS

Animus aims to create a composite instrument from the live solo line and “tape.” The soloist is in conversation with themselves and their own recordings, creating an atmosphere that is simultaneously one player and an indistinct number of players through a hazy veneer.

—ELIJAH DANIEL SMITH (MAY 2022)
ELIJAHDANIELSMITH.COM

LIMINAL HIGHWAY

Liminal Highway was originally conceived as a work for flute and electronics on a commission from Tim Munro. Inspired by a poem of the same name by the poet and songwriter John K. Samson, the five-movement work sought to explode the idea of a traditional flute solo by incorporating new techniques such as key clicks, multiphonics, air sounds, and pre-recorded and live electronic processing.

The work premiered in 2016. A few years later, I began adapting *Liminal Highway* for the saxophone. Many saxophonists had approached me about a new work; I thought that many of the percussive sounds employed in *Liminal* would naturally lend themselves to the instrument.

Around this time, I ran into Julian Velasco at a performance at the Bang on a Can Summer Festival at Mass MoCA. We got to chatting and he mentioned how much he liked Tim’s performance of *Liminal Highway*, so I broached the idea of a sax version; the rest is history. The translation of the work was quite smooth, although some challenges, like a stratospherically-high piccolo, required some creative solutions.

The work is cast in five movements, each one mirroring a line in Samson’s poem. The first, “When you fall asleep in transit,” is focused on layers of flutter-tongue (playing the instrument while rolling the tongue). It is played both on the soprano sax and also the harmonica — the solution to the above-mentioned piccolo issue. The second, “A dream you don’t recall,” features the rhythmic and insistent clicking of keys before layers of slap-tongue, air, and overblown sax take over. The third, “Between consciousness and sleep” alternates a stabbing high note against a bed of quiet multiphonics (using the “wrong fingering” to get two notes at the same time). The fourth, “Liminal,” mirrors the second movement. And the fifth and final, “Suddenly it is needed,” reprises the harmonica and another found object — discarded beer bottles, which are also played with the same flutter-tongue technique.

Liminal Highway was commissioned by New Music USA and Miller Theatre at Columbia University for Tim Munro. The version for saxophone was made in collaboration with Julian Velasco.

—CHRISTOPHER CERRONE (MAY 2022)
CHRISTOPHERCERRONE.COM



JULIAN VELASCO

Winner of Cedille Records' inaugural Emerging Artist Competition in November 2021, saxophonist Julian Velasco is a Chicago-based soloist, collaborative artist, educator, and fierce advocate for contemporary arts whose artistic vision aspires to reflect and celebrate the plurality of our society. Raised in the diverse musical culture of Los Angeles, his own musical background draws from classical, jazz, experimental, and popular styles whose influences inform his approach to all music.

Velasco has premiered over 50 new works, collaborating and performing with a wide range of artists from the likes of Ron Carter, Billy Childs, Jimmy Cobb, Annika Socolofsky, Christian McBride, Rufus Reid, PRISM Quartet, Zhou Tian, Rodney Whitaker, and the Bang on a Can All-Stars. Recent collaborations, fellowships, and premieres have been lauded by *The New York Times* and included in the *Chicago Tribune's* "Chicago's Top 10 for classical music, opera and jazz that defined 2021."

Photo: Jaclyn Simpson

Velasco is the soprano saxophonist of ~Nois saxophone quartet. Known for its "truly innovative musicianship" and "raw creativity" (*Cacophony*), ~Nois has presented over 90 performances in 20 states from coast to coast at festivals such as Big Ears, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, and the University of Chicago Presents series. ~Nois has held residencies and given performances at over 30 institutions including University of Southern California, University of Colorado Boulder, Manhattan School of Music, and Princeton University, and was the 2020–2021 Don Michael Randel Ensemble-in-Residence at the University of Chicago.

A Luminarts Cultural Foundation Fellow in Classical Music, Velasco has garnered top prizes from organizations including Music Teachers National Association, Vandoren Emerging Artists, Yamaha Young Performing Artists, and the North American Saxophone Alliance. He holds degrees from Northwestern University and Michigan State University. At the start of the 2022–2023 season, he will make his Symphony Center concerto-debut with the Chicago Sinfonietta.

julianvelascomusic.com



WINSTON CHOI

Winston Choi's professional career took off when he was named a Laureate of the 2003 Honens International Piano Competition in Canada and a winner of France's 2002 Concours International de Piano 20^e siècle d'Orléans. His solo, collaborative, chamber, and concerto appearances have taken him across four continents. Choi has appeared in recital recently at the National Arts Centre of Canada, Carnegie-Weill Recital Hall, Kennedy Center, Kravis Center, Library of Congress, and Merkin Recital Hall. He performs extensively in France, including appearances at the Salle Cortot, Messiaen Festival, Strasbourg Festival, Lille's Festival Rencontre Robert Casadesus, and at IRCAM. His debut CD, the complete piano works of Elliott Carter (*l'Empreinte Digitale* in France) received five stars from *BBC Music Magazine*, which praised his "sheer élan and pianistic devilment." He can also be heard on the Albany, Arktos, BIS, la Buissonne, Cedille, Crystal, Intrada, Naxos, and QuadroFrame labels. Choi is Associate Professor and Director of the Piano Program at Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts.

roosevelt.edu/academics/faculty/profile/wchoi

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