

Acknowledgements

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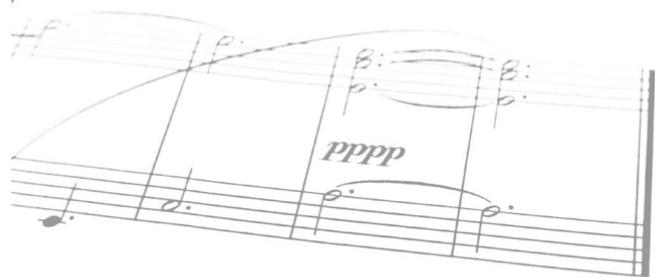
Graham Gordon Ramsay

Compendium

Selected Solo Instrumental Works

Jodi Hagen VIOLIN Scott Nicholas PIANO
Timothy Macri FLUTE Todd Seeber DOUBLE BASS





Completed September 17, 2012, Cambridge, Massachusetts

The Composer

Graham Gordon Ramsay is in demand as a creator of choral and instrumental works for a range of venues, including numerous church congregations in the United States and Europe. Born in California in 1962, Ramsay received musical training at the Tanglewood Institute, Boston University, and the Fontainebleau School in France. He studied composition with such masters as Robert Sirota, Joyce McKeel, Theodore Antoniou, David Del Tredici, Narcis Bonet, and Andrew Thomas, and received voice training from Phyllis Elhady Hoffman and Irène Joachim. Known for his modern yet tuneful style, Ramsay writes predominantly for solo voice, chorus, solo instruments, and chamber ensemble. In recent years he has been commissioned to create liturgical works for the choirs of King's Chapel in Boston, St Stephen's Episcopal Church in Providence, Rhode Island, St. Thomas More Church in New York City, and many other congregations, and his works have been performed in settings ranging from the Chapel at Frederiksborg Castle in Denmark to the Basilica of San Simpliciano in Milan, Italy. His setting of Psalm 121 for chorus and solo violin won first prize in the 2003 Roger Wagner Contemporary Choral Composition Competition and was published in 2005 by Gentry. *The Sacred Voice*, Ramsay's first commercial CD of sacred choral works, was released by Albany Records in 2011.

Notes from the Composer

About a decade ago, I began to seriously reexamine my life in music, taking stock of the compositions I had created and looking forward to the kinds of works I wanted to compose in my future. This kind of introspection was sobering, as it was hard not to think of my own mortality. I tried to imagine what it would be like if I were to compose just two works per year until I was 70 years old. What kinds of musical forms and genres would I explore, and which instruments and performers would I write for? The more I thought about it, the more excited I became. I began to relish the idea of new musical explorations and creating a body of work that contributes to the musical literature in some small way.

As I looked back on my finished pieces and continued to write new compositions, I realized that it was already possible to hear in my musical portfolio—incomplete though it is—themes and connections that illustrate my interests as a composer, interests with deep roots in my biography and training. Taken together, the pieces define a personal style, or at least a tendency to occupy and mark out specific musical landscapes and territories.

One of these territories is sacred choral music, the focus of my previous album, *The Sacred Voice*. Another is solo instrumental music, the theme of this *Compendium*. The works here span the years 1984–2012 and can be interpreted as a map to the musical relationships I've formed with teachers, colleagues, and collaborators—most of them here in Boston, my longtime home.

During my undergraduate years studying composition at Boston University, my instrument of study was voice. Although I grew up playing clarinet and piano, I never felt I was accomplished enough to pursue these instruments for public performance after high school, and quickly understood that if I wanted to realize my compositions, I would need to collaborate with willing performers. Over the years, I have been fortunate enough to forge working relationships with a large collection of talented musicians, all of whom have been good and patient teachers.

I spent the summer of 1984 studying at the Conservatoire Americain at Fontainebleau, a life-changing experience by any measure. Although the school's legendary founder Nadia Boulanger had passed away

several years before, her presence was felt everywhere through her students and colleagues who taught there. My principal composition teacher was Narcis Bonet, but I also attended workshops and master classes with Henri Dutilleux and Betsy Jolas, influential composers whose lessons and examples were absorbed as part of my own musical vocabulary.

Perhaps the greatest influence that summer was Mme. Irène Joachim, the granddaughter of the violinist Josef Joachim and a remarkable singer who became famous for her interpretation of the role of Mélisande in Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Joachim graciously accepted me into her voice studio and not only taught me French art song, but gave me a unique insight into French musical history and culture.

I was full of enthusiasm and ideas for new works when I returned to my studies at Boston University. That year I began studying composition with Theodore Antoniou. Theodore is a prolific composer, who in his early years had made a study of virtually all the standard orchestral instruments by composing solo works for each one. Under his influence, I began what has become a lifelong practice of developing relationships with particular instrumentalists and writing specifically for them.

One of my earliest efforts in this direction was with the string bass player **Todd Seeber**. He and I were both studying at BU, and I set out to create a work that would be a showpiece for Todd's remarkable talents. (He graduated from BU and promptly landed the principal chair position with the Buffalo Symphony Orchestra; two years later he would become one of the youngest musicians ever to win a job with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.) As a singer, I was heavily influenced by my studies of the vocal literature—opera, oratorio, and art song. *Prologue and Two Scenes for Double Bass* was composed for Todd to show the bass as a lyrical solo voice, capable of great virtuosity and emotive possibilities.

As the title suggests, the first short movement foreshadows motivic ideas that are developed in the second and third movements. The work explores the entire range of the instrument, including some utterly stratospheric writing in the second movement, *Aria*—a sign of my own naiveté at the time about the demands I was putting on the player.

But Todd attacked these sections fearlessly. When he revisited the work for this recording some 20 years later, he described the feeling of performing that movement as “being a tightrope walker without a net.” In addition to occupying an extraordinarily high range for the instrument, *Aria* also calls for a slow sustained melody over a constant open-string drone. Todd's interpretation is breathtaking—expressive, delicately nuanced, and confident. The final movement *Scherzo* displays yet another aspect of Todd's virtuosity through rapid passagework and *spiccato* bowing technique (literally bouncing the bow on the strings).

My time at Boston University was critical to my development as a composer. I had the opportunity to study with outstanding teachers including Robert Sirota, Joyce McKeel, David Del Tredici, Theodore Antoniou, John Daverio, and Phyllis Hoffman. These people gave me a strong technical foundation in music, while also helping to shape my aesthetic understanding and musical philosophy. They taught me to have a well defined intention behind each work and to be mindful of the audience I hoped to address.

My teachers were generous with their time and energy. One standout was John Daverio, a highly regarded musicologist whose specialty was the work of the German romantic composers. John was a brilliant teacher of music history, a subject that can be deadly in the hands of a less gifted teacher.

John had been a complete Boston University School of Music product, starting as a young student studying violin and playing for the pre-college Greater Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra (GBYSO). He completed his undergraduate studies, master's degree and PhD at BU, finally becoming a respected member of the faculty. Because John had experienced BU both as a student and as a faculty member, he had the gift of being able to bridge that cultural divide and was a great supporter of the students. In 1985, in an act typical of his generosity, he agreed to premiere a work that I had composed called *Sonata for Violin and Four Voices*. The work was very difficult and made big demands on the violinist. John gave the work a wonderful premier.

In 2003 John died tragically and mysteriously, drowning in Boston's Charles River. I was deeply saddened by the untimely passing of this kind man and decided to compose a work in his memory, basing the piece on musical material taken from the *Andante* movement from the sonata he had premiered

in 1985. This new work, *Elegy for Violin and Piano*, was premiered in 2008 at the St. Botolph Club in Boston by violinist *Jodi Hagen* and pianist *Scott Nicholas*. Jodi, too, had been a student of Daverio, being coached by him when she was a young student in GBYSO. For this recording, I created a violin and piano arrangement of the andante movement for Jodi and Scott and paired it with the elegy. It was an emotionally charged but rewarding exercise to take the short, spirited movement and reshape it to pay homage to the memory of this influential man.

During the winter of 2004 I had the pleasure of meeting flutist Ole Nielsen. Several years before, Ole had been a freshman in the Experimental Study Group (ESG), an alternative freshman program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); he went on to do a PhD in electrical engineering. In my role as Program Coordinator, one of my yearly duties was to organize informal concerts featuring members of the ESG community. It was through these concerts that I was introduced to Ole's masterful playing.

Ole had been an Emerson Scholar during all his years at MIT, studying with Sue-Ellen Hershman-Tcherepnin, widow of composer Ivan Tcherepnin and herself a strong advocate for new music. Since Ole and I shared common musical sensibilities, I approached him about composing a new work. The resulting *Four Autumn Sketches for Flute and Piano* was premiered by Ole on March 18, 2005, as part of a recital at MIT that fulfilled his Emerson Scholarship requirements.

Four Autumn Sketches is a highly visual piece. Both of my parents were professional photographers, and I have worked as a photographer myself for a number of years, so it is perhaps not surprising that I often think about music in a visual context. I have always been attracted to musical works that tell specific stories or describe physical objects or spaces.

The piece I wrote for Ole describes four different New England locations I visited during the fall of 2004. The first movement, *Courtyard, Boston Public Library*, takes much of its musical material from the physical proportions of the courtyard, in terms of both pitch and time signatures. The work opens with a three-bar introduction and then divides into four roughly equal sections: "Allegretto," "Gracefully," "Sprightly," and "Broadly," each describing different perspectives and moods from within the courtyard.

The second movement, *The Ghosts of Blanchard, Maine*, refers to a trip I took with my mother in October 2004 to investigate the maternal ancestral home where my great-great-grandfather was born, and that his father before him had built. The original farmhouse is still standing, and I found myself wandering the acreage listening to the sounds of the place, imagining the presences of three generations of my forebears. This experience is reflected using a dramatically different language from the previous movement, with an eleven-tone row as the basis for the flute line.

Movement three, *Walden Pond*, is a meditation on the place made famous by Henry David Thoreau's writings. It is composed in a simple and constant $\frac{3}{4}$ time, but plays with long suspensions over the bar line and elongated syncopations, creating a floating quality that belies the steady underlying beat pattern. The final movement, *Rock River, Newfane, Vermont*, is a fast flowing bravura movement that reflects my impressions of the river at high crest with the loud, relentless drive of rushing water during a bright sunlit day. It divides into three sections (fast-slow-fast), with the middle section describing a calmer, sensuous part of the river and its wooded environs.

A piece composed at the same time as the *Four Autumn Sketches* was a short *Lullaby*, also for flute and piano. While I was still forming my thoughts about the larger suite, I thought the *Lullaby* might be included as a fifth sketch, but realized that it was too different in nature from the other movements, and so it stands alone as a separate work.

In 2009, I began working on *Six Preludes for Piano* as a vehicle for pianist Andrew Wang, another gifted musician studying at MIT. Andrew was accomplished with much of the great nineteenth-century piano literature, but had rarely performed any twentieth-century works, and never anything from the twenty-first century. Unwilling to pass up such a rich collaborative and teaching opportunity, I wanted to compose these preludes to include plenty of famous classical references, while also incorporating a range of more modern musical devices, including serial elements and bi-tonality.

Months later, after listening critically to the preludes, I realized just how much the work pays homage to a diverse range of composers whose keyboard music has become incorporated into my psyche over the years: Bach, Gershwin, Berg, Brahms, Debussy, Messiaen, Poulenc, Scarlatti, Stravinsky, and Prokofiev,

to name just a few. Since *Six Preludes for Piano* is the most recent composition on this album, it reflects the amalgamation of these influences and (hopefully) the maturation of a personal style.

I do not set out with the intention to compose works that are difficult to perform, but technical virtuosity seems to be a common attribute throughout much of my writing. The preludes are prime examples. They reflect my life and feelings at the time they were written, and those feelings translated into some challenging movements. Because I was composing for Andrew, who is so highly skilled, I felt safe taking certain artistic chances, knowing he that would be equal to the resulting technical challenges. This 23-minute piece took nearly two and a half years to complete, in part because of external events during this period, including the death of my mother, a house fire that displaced me from my home for six months, and a spurious lawsuit (since withdrawn). Happily, the completion of these preludes represented an end to that harrowing chapter in my life, although many of my struggles during that period are, I believe, evident in the work.

In order to secure professional studio recordings of the works on this CD, I reached into the deep pool of performing talent around Boston. The pianist on the *Six Preludes for Piano* is **Scott Nicholas**, with whom I've worked before on many other projects. Scott is also the pianist on the other collaborative works with piano on this CD. Performing the *Four Autumn Sketches* is the flutist **Timothy Macri**, another fine Boston-based player. In 2005 Tim premiered my 30-minute chamber work for flute, organ, percussion, and narrator titled *The Nightingale*, based on the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen.

Looking back over the past 30 years of my composition, I am struck by how autobiographical the work is. Each piece has a story behind it, serving as a sort of diary entry, reminding me of the influences and personal events that were taking place at the time it was composed. I listen to the works now with a combination of wistfulness and excitement, as I remember a more youthful time and imagine how new works will reflect my life to come. Perhaps the greatest satisfaction comes from the feeling that I am part of a continuum of musicians through time. I have worked with exceptional teachers and collaborators who have taught me so much that I feel obliged to pass it forward, to take what I have been taught and present it for others to experience.

I am grateful to Albany Records for the opportunity to release this compendium. It serves not only as a record of my efforts in the genre of solo instrumental literature, but also as a launch point for the next chapter in my journey as composer. I am also grateful to the performers who have executed these works so well. Together, we are helping to bring new listeners into a world of musical ideas.

—Graham Gordon Ramsay

The Performers



Violinist **Jodi Hagen** received an Artist Diploma, Masters Degree, and Bachelor Degree in violin performance at Boston University where she was a student of Roman Totenberg. Ms. Hagen has earned honors for her solo and chamber music performances from Boston University, the Carmel International Chamber Music Competition, and the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition. She records as soloist for the PBS television series “American Experience.” Jodi has appeared in recitals at the Saint Botolph Club, King’s Chapel, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), The Nahant Historical Society, and Boston University, among others. Ms. Hagen has been featured soloist at Boston University, with the Harvard Summer School Orchestra, with the MIT Summer Philharmonic, and with the Salem Philharmonic Orchestras. As a freelance violinist in Boston, Jodi is a member of Boston Lyric Opera Orchestra, Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, Boston Classical Orchestra, and performs with Chamber Orchestra of Boston. She performs with the Boston Ballet Orchestra and is concertmaster of Boston Midsummer Opera. As a member of Emmanuel Music she performed at Lincoln Center, throughout Europe, and recorded for Koch International and Nonesuch Records. Since 2007, Jodi has performed more than 20 recitals with world-renowned organist Heinrich Christensen as a partner of Scandia Duo. She is also a member of Trio Nordica. Jodi is a member of the violin faculty at the New England Conservatory’s Preparatory School/Continuing Education and Phillips Exeter Academy.



Flutist **Timothy Macri** attended Boston Conservatory to study with Randolph Bowman, and later attended the New England Conservatory to study with Lois Schaefer. He is the principal flutist with the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra, plays principal piccolo with the Sarasota Opera Association, and is Assistant Music Director of the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (Mission Church) in Boston. Mr. Macri is a highly sought after freelance flutist in the Boston area and a popular guest soloist and chamber music collaborator. Notable solo engagements include appearances at Methuen Memorial Music Hall, King's Chapel Concert Series, St. John the Divine Concert Series in New York City, and the Venti/Cordi series in Kennebunk, Maine. He has appeared as concerto soloist with the New Bedford Symphony, the Rome Symphony, and the Georgia Philharmonic.



With a broad repertoire spanning both the classical and music theater genres, pianist **Scott Nicholas** has appeared throughout the United States and internationally as soloist and as chamber musician. He has served as rehearsal and performance pianist for the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, The Borromeo String Quartet, Longwood Opera, Minnesota Opera, Boston Lyric Opera's outreach programs, the US Air Force Clarinet Ensemble, the Leontyne Price Vocal Arts Competition, the Boston Secession, and the Concord Women's Chorus, among others. He has recorded with E.C. Schirmer's Philovox ensemble, performed live on WGBH-FM, and has been heard on WBUR-FM in Boston. An experienced music director, Nicholas has served in that capacity for several organizations including Central Square Theater, Franklin Performing Arts Company, Suffolk University, and Emerson College. He is on the faculty at Emerson College, and is a Senior Lecturer at Suffolk University where he teaches piano and coaches opera and music theater. He serves on the faculty of Encore Music Academy offering instruction in piano, theory, and vocal coaching. Nicholas holds a B.A. in music education from The College of New Jersey and an M.M. from the New England Conservatory in accompanying/vocal coaching.



Bassist **Todd Seeber** joined the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1988 at age 22. At the BSO he occupies the Eleanor L. and Levin H. Campbell chair. Seeber was previously principal bass of the Buffalo Philharmonic, where he was a frequent soloist, and was assistant principal bass of the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra and the Handel & Haydn Society. He won first prize in the 1988 American String Teachers National Solo Competition and was a 1984 winner of the Boston University Concerto-Aria Competition. He received a B.M., Boston University, where he studied bass and composition. He was a student of Henry Portnoi and a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center. He is an active teacher and coach at Boston University, the New England Conservatory, and at Tanglewood. Many of his former students have gone on to careers in major orchestras and are pursuing important musical projects around the country.

Prologue and Two Scenes for Double Bass recorded December 10, 2006, Chapel of the Holy Spirit, Campion Jesuit Center, Weston, Massachusetts; *Four Autumn Sketches* and *Lullaby* recorded August 20, 2007, Church of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts; *Elegy for Violin and Piano* and *Andante* recorded October 16, 2008, Church of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts; *Six Preludes for Piano*: preludes I. through V. recorded November 12, 2012; prelude VI. recorded January 3, 2013; all preludes recorded at WBGH Fraser Performance Studio, Boston, Massachusetts.

Graham Gordon Ramsay

Compendium
Selected Solo
Instrumental Works



Four Autumn Sketches for Flute & Piano (2005)

- 1 I. Courtyard, Boston Public Library [4:43]
- 2 II. The Ghosts of Blanchard, Maine [4:25]
- 3 III. Walden Pond [5:07]
- 4 IV. Rock River, Newfane, Vermont [3:13]

Timothy Macri **FLUTE**
Scott Nicholas **PIANO**

Prologue & Two Scenes for Double Bass (1984)

- 5 I. Prologue [1:25]
- 6 II. Aria [5:41]
- 7 III. Scherzo [3:01]

Todd Seeber **DOUBLE BASS**

Six Preludes for Piano (2012)

- 8 I. Emphatically [3:39]
- 9 II. Dream-like [2:38]
- 10 III. With Good Humor [3:06]
- 11 IV. Arabesque [4:09]
- 12 V. In Memoriam [7:28]
- 13 VI. Presto, leggiero/marcato [3:55]

Scott Nicholas **PIANO**

- 14 **Andante from Sonata for Violin & Four Voices (1985)** [1:17]

- 15 **Elegy for Violin & Piano (2008)** [9:05]

Jodi Hagen **VIOLIN**
Scott Nicholas **PIANO**

- 16 **Lullaby (2005)** [4:19]

Timothy Macri **FLUTE**
Scott Nicholas **PIANO**

Total Time = 68:17

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