

BEN VERDERY & ULYSSES QUARTET

A GIANT BESIDE YOU



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Ben Verdery
Classical & Electric Guitar

Ulysses Quartet
Christina Bouey, violin
Rhiannon Banerdt, violin
Colin Brookes, viola
Grace Ho, cello

Bryce Dessner (b. 1976)
1 **Quintet for High Strings** (2018) 18:02
composed for and dedicated to Ben Verdery

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)
Clarinet Sonata
arr. string quartet and guitar by Ben Verdery (2017)
2 **Grazioso** 3:36
3 **Andantino-Vivace Leggiero** 7:15

Ben Verdery (b. 1955)
4 **About To Fall** (2022) 3:12
5 **A Giant Beside You** (2021-2022) 6:47

Javier Farias (b. 1973)
Andean Suite
6 **Yawar Fiesta** 5:42
7 **Huayno** 7:19
8 **Diablada** 3:30

Total: 55:23

The year was 1981, and my wife, Rie Schmidt, had just played the role of flutist and dancer in a new production of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* at the Kennedy Center. Following the performance, we were all invited to attend the after-party. To our delight and awe, at the front of the room sat the maestro himself at the piano playing Beatles songs. As a rock guitarist turned classical guitarist and a devout Beatles fan, I listened with joy and amazement.

Bernstein's love of music of all genres is well documented. Upon reflection, this open-hearted musical approach is a blueprint for the repertoire on this recording. It is at the core of the musical souls of all the artists on this album. I think I can speak for the Ulysses Quartet, Bryce, and Javier in thanking all the musical giants that stood before us and continue to stand next to us.

— Ben Verdery

Notes

1 Bryce Dessner: **Quintet for High Strings**

Quintet for High Strings was composed for my dear friend, Ben Verdery, who has been a part of my life for nearly twenty-five years. Over the last several years I have composed a good deal of music for strings, including several orchestral works, three quartets and solo works for violin, viola, and cello. This quintet brings me back to my primary instrument — the guitar — and my relationship with Ben, which was so formative in my development as a musician. In this new piece, I am exploring my relationship to the guitar in a new way. By re-stringing the instrument with high strings, the guitar plays a more melodic and ornamental role in the quintet, traditional arpeggio patterns become fast scalar passages and bass notes sound an octave or two above their normal register. This piece is in three movements with mixed meter. The guitar patterns drive the first movement, the second movement follows the strings through several more chromatic and virtuosic passages, and the last movement is an adapted folk song whose picking patterns echo a piece of Ben's I used to perform, titled *Milwaukee*.

2-3 Leonard Bernstein: **Clarinet Sonata** *arrangement for guitar and string quartet by Ben Verdery*

While listening to Derek Bermel play the orchestrated version of Leonard Bernstein's *Clarinet Sonata* with the American Composer's Orchestra in Zankel Hall, I turned to my wife, Rie, and said "This might make a terrific guitar piece." Thus began a challenging and gratifying artistic journey. I have always loved the creative endeavor of arranging music from a variety of genres for the classical guitar, and this piece was no exception. By making an arrangement, we provide an entrée for the classical guitar to perform repertoire that might not otherwise exist. In doing so, we extend our audience and open new artistic doors for guitarists.

While working with Robert Levin on my arrangement of Mozart's Adagio K.540, he reminded me that when we arrange a work, we are essentially creating a new piece. I am thrilled to present this "new" piece for guitar and string quartet by Leonard Bernstein who is one of my all-time heroes!

When I began this arrangement, it was evident from the outset that the clarinet part simply played on the

guitar would not be musically satisfying. Unlike YoYo Ma's brilliant arrangement for the cello, I would have to make other artistic choices. This was primarily because of the clarinet's dynamic range and ability to sustain. The idea of arranging it for string quartet and guitar seemed optimal.

Different solutions became clear as I worked through the piece. In double *forte* passages, I often had one of the violinists play in unison with the guitar. When a passage had low sustained notes, I passed it to the cello or the viola. To my utter delight, several of the right- and left-hand piano passages played beautifully on the classical guitar. This allowed different members of the quartet to be featured playing some of the beautiful melodic passages with guitar accompaniment. One of my favorite such passages is an eight-measure duet with the viola before the return of the A section in the final movement. Here, the right-hand piano part is in e minor: tailor made for the guitar!

In closing, I would like to thank the Leonard Bernstein Foundation for approving this arrangement and to Boosey and Hawkes for giving me permission to record it.

4 Ben Verdery: **About to Fall**

About to Fall is an homage to one of my favorite composers and dear friends, Ingram Marshall. Throughout the piece, one hears the swelling of chords begun by electric guitar or string quartet. At the peak of the swell, the color shifts by changing instrumentation from one to the other. In the guitar part, this swell is achieved with the use of a volume pedal. It is a technique that I borrowed from Ingram who used it in his extraordinary double concerto, *Dark Florescence*, for electric guitar, classical guitar, and orchestra. Ingram composed the work for legendary electric guitarist Andy Summers and me in 2005.

A minute and twenty-eight seconds into *About to Fall*, one hears a melody first stated by the cello and immediately imitated by the electric guitar. The melody is the opening motive in the following piece, *A Giant Beside You*. It is played at less than half tempo. This melody is repeated throughout the rest of the work.

It is my hope that somewhere, somehow, Ingram has heard this humble tribute.

5 Ben Verdery: **A Giant Beside You**

I was over the moon to write an electric guitar and string quartet piece for the Ulysses String Quartet. After some thought, I decided to re-orchestrate a work that I was commissioned to write for the wonderful Australian guitar quartet, Guitar Trek. The commission specifically stated that the work be inspired by a popular song of the composer's choice. *Stand*, by Sly and the Family Stone, the groundbreaking band of the late 60's and early 70's, was my pick.

The song's harmonic progression (including the surprise shift in tonality), funky riff, hand clapping, and final melody all inspired me. These elements found their way into my piece, although perhaps not in an obvious manner.

For the first few minutes of the piece, it is almost like the guitar is just sitting in with the quartet. Then the quartet gives the guitar the green light to join in, full on. It is a joyful piece, full of surprises emanating from both the quartet and the guitar. I tried to channel a few of my guitar heroes, most notably, Jimi, Jeff and Duane!

I love the lyrics of *Stand*. The spirit of this piece tries to emulate the spirit of *Stand's* lyrics. The title of my work is taken from those lyrics with a slight alteration: there's always a giant next to you -- and you might be a giant yourself!

Javier Farias: **Andean Suite**

6 I. **Yawar Fiesta**

The *Yawar Fiesta* is a celebration in Peru accompanied by a raging fight between a bull and an Andean condor. The blood fight involves tying a condor on top of a bull wherein both struggle to get rid of each other. It is conducted on July 29 every year, a day after Peru's Independence Day. This ceremony is a symbolic representation of the power of the Andean peoples (the condor) over the Spanish (the bull.)

7 II. **Huayno**

The *huayno* comes from the Altiplano ("high plains"), a part of the Andean mountain chain that encompasses what is now the east of Bolivia, the center and south of Peru, the northeast of Argentina and the north of Chile. This sad, slow, and lyrical rhythm is probably the most authentic form of Andean music, and it represents a popular appreciation of shared ethnic cultures and has provided inspiration for composers of classical, popular and folkloric music alike for generations.

8 III. **Diablada**

This is arguably the most renowned traditional dance of Bolivia and forms the main part of the Oruro Carnival. La *Diablada* is a fabulous display of heavy, colorful masks and elaborate costumes, and is accompanied by traditional musical instruments from the Andes, such as the zampoña (pan flute) and the quena (a vertical flute).



Pictured clockwise (starting top left):
Christina Bouey, Rhiannon Banerdt,
Grace Ho, Colin Brookes
Center: Ben Verdery





Ben Verdery and the Ulysses Quartet performing Bryce Dessner's *Quintet for High Strings* at the Gala Opening of the Schwarzman Center at Yale University.

Bios

Bryce Dessner is an American composer and guitarist based in Paris, as well as a member of the rock band the National. Dessner's twin brother Aaron is also a member of the group. Together they write the music, in collaboration with lead singer / lyricist Matt Berninger.

In addition to his work with the National, Dessner is known for his independent work as a composer. His orchestral, chamber, and vocal compositions have been commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Ensemble intercontemporain, Metropolitan Museum of Art (for the New York Philharmonic), Kronos Quartet, Carnegie Hall, BAM Next Wave Festival, Barbican Centre, Edinburgh International Festival, Sounds from a Safe Harbour Festival, Cork City County, Cork Ireland, Sydney Festival, eighth blackbird, Sō Percussion, New York City Ballet, and many others. His work *Murder Ballades* was featured on Eighth Blackbird's album *Filament*, an album he also produced and performs on, and which won the 2016 Grammy Award for Best Small Ensemble Performance.

Dessner has collaborated with artists such as Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Paul Simon, Sufjan Stevens, Nico Muhly, Jonny Greenwood, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Alejandro González Iñárritu, Justin Peck, Ragnar Kjartansson, Katia and Marielle Labèque, and Taylor Swift, among others.

Dessner is the founder of the MusicNOW Festival, co-founder of Copenhagen's HAVEN festival, and co-curates the Festival Sounds from a Safe Harbour. He is a founding member of the improvisatory instrumental group Clogs and co-founder of Brassland Records. In 2018, Dessner was named one of eight creative and artistic partners for the San Francisco Symphony as part of incoming Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen's new leadership model for the orchestra from 2020. He has a master's degree in music from Yale University.

Javier Farías has been honored by having his music performed and recorded by some of the main exponents of the guitar such as Eliot Fisk, Ben Verdery, David Tanenbaum, Joaquín Clerch Díaz, Gabriel Bianco, Emanuele Segre, Ricardo Cobo, Carlos Perez, Andy Summers—legendary rock guitarist of The Police, and premier jazz-fusion guitarist Mike Stern. In 2014 Farías was awarded a commission from the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard University and he has also won first prizes in the Michele Pittaluga Composition Competition for Classical Guitar (2004), the Andrés Segovia Composition Contest (2005), and the 2 Agosto International Composing Competition (2008).

Ben Verdery

Hailed for his innovative and eclectic musical career, **Benjamin Verdery** tours regularly throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia, performing at major venues and festivals. As a recording artist, Verdery has released more than 17 albums, some featuring works by leading composers of our time who have created music for Verdery, including composers Martin Bresnick, David Leisner, Frederic Hand, Elizabeth Brown, Dan Asia, Van Stiefel, Roberto Sierra, Aaron Jay Kernis, Hannah Lash, Christopher Theofanidis, Ezra Laderman, Bryce Dessner, Jack Veas, Thomas Flippin and Ingram Marshall.

He has also created and released several exquisitely filmed videos in collaboration with other artists. Verdery has recorded and/or performed with such diverse artists as Andy Summers, William Coulter, Simon Powis, Leo Kottke, Anthony Newman, Jessye Norman, Wayne Escoffery, James Taylor (tenor), Ettore Causa, Paco Peña, Hermann Prey, John Williams, hip-hop artist Billy Dean Thomas, beatbox/

vocal percussionist Marc Martin, Jiji, Nano Stern and the St. Lawrence String Quartet.

A prolific, published composer in his own right, many of Verdery's compositions have been performed, recorded, and published over the years. Several of today's most renowned guitarists have recorded and performed his works including John Williams, David Russell, the Assad Duo, Los Angeles Guitar Quartet and Guitar Trek.

He has been commissioned to compose works for guitar solo, duo, large ensembles, and film. His *Scenes from Ellis Island*, for guitar orchestra, has been extensively broadcast and performed at festivals and universities in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Europe.

Since 1985, Verdery has been guitar professor at the Yale School of Music. From 2007-2019 he served as Artistic Director of 92NY's Art of the Guitar series and has been Producer of his Maui Summer Master Class since 1999.



Ben Verdery, 2022. Photo: John Olson

Ulysses Quartet

The **Ulysses Quartet** has been praised for their “textural versatility,” “grave beauty” and “the kind of chemistry many quartets long for, but rarely achieve” (The Strad). Founded in the summer of 2015, the group won the grand prize and gold medal at the 2016 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, first prize at the 2017 American Prize, 2018 Schoenfeld International String Competition, 2019 Vietnam International Music Competition, and second prize in the 2017 Osaka International Chamber Music Competition. Violinists Christina Bouey and Rhiannon Banerdt, violist Colin Brookes and cellist Grace Ho hail from Canada, the United States and Taiwan. They have performed in such prestigious halls as Carnegie Hall, the Harbin Grand Theatre, Jordan Hall, and the Taiwan National Recital Hall. Other notable engagements include CMS Lincoln Center, Sociedad Filarmónica de Bilbao, Premiere Performances Hong Kong, National Arts Centre, Fundación Juan March, Wigmore Hall, and Teatro Mayor Julio Mario Santo Domingo. Ulysses was the Lisa Arnhold Fellows at Juilliard from 2019 to 2022, the school’s Graduate Resident String Quartet. The Ulysses Quartet Foundation believes intensely in the power of music to inspire, enlighten, and bring people together. Ulysses aims to use this platform to raise the voices of underrepresented BIPOC and female composers.



Ulysses Quartet. Photo, L Desberg

The members of Ulysses hold degrees from the Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music, New England Conservatory and Yale University. The musicians perform on instruments and bows graciously on loan from the Maestro Foundation and private donors. Ulysses is grateful for the support of Shar Music and Connolly Music as YSOA ambassadors.



Back Row: Matthew LeFevre, Colin Brookes, Michael Sinicropi
Front Row: Christina Bouey, Ben Verdery, Grace Ho,
Rhiannon Banerdt



In studio: Bryce Dessner with Matthew LeFevre
Photo by Ben Verdery



Javier Farias and Ben Verdery
on stage. Photo courtesy of the
Escuela Moderna de Musica,
Santiago Chile

Produced by Matthew LeFevre and Ben Verdery.
Recording, Mixing and Mastering by Matthew LeFevre.

Ben Verdery played a 1995 Greg Smallman on *Quintet for High Strings*, a Garrett Lee guitar for the Bernstein *Clarinet Sonata* and *Andean Suite* and a Jack Vees Electric guitar for *About to Fall* and *A Giant Beside You*.

Ben Verdery plays on D'Addario strings exclusively.

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All session photos and live photo of the Ulysses Quartet and Ben by Michael Sinicropi

In studio photo of Bryce Dessner with Matthew LeFevre, Ben Verdery

Javier Farias and Ben Verdery on stage courtesy of the Escuela Moderna de Musica, Santiago Chile

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Quintet for High Strings.

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for High Strings*.

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