

The inspiration for **West of the Sun** came when Tam Henderson, A&R Director of Reference Recordings, came to me after a recent solo recital with the idea of music selections “from the Americas”. In my solo performances, and on my album **World Keys**, I’ve been exploring the boundaries of the traditional piano recital, using pieces by composers of diverse cultural backgrounds, such as Syria, China, and Turkey. The New World – with a rich history told through seductive Latin rhythms, sophisticated European compositional techniques, American enterprise, and the powerful currents of colonialism, black and white, male and female – seemed ripe for a fresh look. **West of the Sun** presents works of nine different composers – from new discoveries to classics, in diverse forms including the maxixe, tango, milonga, chôro, Negro spiritual, etude, a set of bagatelles, and two sonatas – all from the Western side of the globe. Enjoy the journey!



Ernesto Nazareth (1863-1934): **Vem cá Branquinha**

The prolific Brazilian composer Ernesto Nazareth (1863–1934) wrote over 200 short pieces for piano, fusing influences as diverse as Frederic Chopin and Scott Joplin with dance genres such as waltzes, polkas, and Brazilian tangos, which were popular in the salons of Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the century. Nazareth's music is full of pleasing melody, harmonic inventiveness and rhythmic swing. Nazareth himself was a pianist who played at the famous Odeon movie theatre, and of his music, no less an authority than Villa-Lobos described Nazareth as the “true incarnation of Brazilian soul”.

Nazareth's Brazilian tangos are derived from the *maxixe*, a dance form that originated in Rio de Janeiro, with roots in Afro-Brazilian dance from black slaves from Maxixe, Mozambique. The rhythmically intricate tango **Vem cá Branquinha** alludes to a racially diverse Brazilian society with an affectionate, if off-color come hither. “Vem cá Branquinha”, loosely translated from Portuguese, means “come here, little darling (white girl)”. The primary theme – a teasing, syncopated melody that appears alternately in the left and right hands – segues into a joyous central section subtitled “Vem cá Mulata”, or “come here, mulatta girl (one who has a black parent and a white parent). Evidently, Nazareth was an equal opportunity flirt!

Interestingly, in a theme that recurs throughout this album (of using popular idioms in service of art music), Nazareth took the melody of “Vem cá Mulata” from a tango of the same name – a popular hit at Brazil's 1906 Carnival festival.

Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869): **Suis-moi! Caprice**
(1861)

Even more of a flirt was New Orleans-born Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869) – a truly colorful figure who was America’s first “matinee idol”, a 19th century version of Elvis Presley, with the requisite sex scandal to boot. A female pianist, upon hearing of Gottschalk’s early death, wrote: “the infatuation that I and 999,999 other American girls once felt for him, still lingers in my breast!” At the same time, Gottschalk spent plenty of time performing and composing. The eminent Hector Berlioz championed Gottschalk’s “delicious compositions” with influences from “Creoles” – referring to people of mixed French, African, Spanish, and Native American ancestry, with familial ties to Louisiana.

The **Suis-moi! Caprice** is elegance, capriciousness and virtuosity in three minutes. The work has roots in the *danzón*, a Creole salon dance from Cuba that combines Western European melody and harmony with subtly lilting African-influenced rhythms. Gottschalk writes:

The Author has endeavoured to convey an idea of the singular rhythm and charming character, of the music which exists among the Creoles of the Spanish Antilles. Chopin it is well known transferred the national traits of Poland, to his Mazurkas and Polonaises, and Mr. Gottschalk has endeavored to reproduce in works of an appropriate character, the characteristic traits of the Dances of the West Indies.

A consummate showman, Gottschalk traveled throughout the United States – to large cities and small towns – giving hundreds of recitals. Later on, he would stage gigantic musical productions incorporating hundreds of performers. Despite his successes, Gottschalk was not to meet a happy end, and he died in Brazil at 40 years of age, practically penniless.

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992): **Flora's Game**, Milonga Prelude (1987)

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) was born in Argentina in 1921, but moved to New York in 1925, where the young Piazzolla was exposed to “jazz, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway” at the famed Cotton Club. At the age of nine, Piazzolla received the instrument that would play a large role in his future compositions – the *bandoneon*, or button accordion. At sixteen, Piazzolla returned to Buenos Aires where he studied piano and harmony with a young Alberto Ginastera, who is featured later in this album. While in his thirties, Piazzolla traveled to Europe and met Nadia Boulanger, the famed composition teacher, who inspired him to meld his beloved tango with influences of classical and jazz. Piazzolla's unique creation – the so-called *tango nuevo* – became the basis of his immense popularity from the 1960s onwards. In contrast to the Brazilian composer Nazareth, who wrote tangos derived from the Afro-Brazilian *maxixe* dance, Piazzolla's tangos have their roots in the tango music that originated with the European immigrant populations in Buenos Aires.

Written in 1987, Astor Piazzolla's **Flora's Game** (Milonga Prelude) is from a collection of Three Preludes for solo piano. The *milonga* is a dance form that was the precursor of the Argentine tango, and Piazzolla was apt at fusing the distinctive flavor of each dance into his own inimitable style. This little-known work has an introduction that features tango rhythms, segues into a haunting, lyrical milonga section, and then traverses a rapid section which is anchored by the characteristic rhythm of the milonga in its bass line.

Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983): **Sonata No. 1** (1952)

Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) is one of Argentina's most important composers, with numerous works for orchestra, choir, ensembles and solo instruments, and a distinguished educational legacy from his long associations with Argentina's music conservatories. But Ginastera's influence also extended outside the boundaries of music – he was twice removed from his conservatory positions for protests against Argentina's political regimes.

The Sonata No. 1 dates from Ginastera's "objective nationalist" period, in which folk idioms are featured – particularly from the Argentine Pampas, the vast plain surrounding Buenos Aires patrolled by the gauchos (cowboys), and culturally, the source of romantic fantasies as a place where man can discover himself. At the same time, the work has audible influences from Prokofiev and Bartok. The virtuosic work is a whirlwind in 14 minutes. The first movement *Allegro marcato*, a traditional sonata form, features asymmetric (e.g. 2+3+3, 3+2) rhythms, and two contrasting themes – the first, a fanfare with biting rhythms, and the second a lyrical, pastoral theme. The second movement, *Presto misterioso*, is built from a cloud of chromatic harmonies with a fanfare theme emerging from time to time. The initial mysterious figuration of this movement uses all twelve notes of the chromatic scale. The slow movement, *Adagio molto appassionato*, explores the different registers of the piano, evoking the mysterious sounds of the South American Pipes. The finale *Ruvido ed ostinato* is a fierce toccata, *moto perpetuo*, alternating duple and triple rhythms, that builds from material introduced in the first theme of the sonata, culminating in a ferocious climax.

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959): **Chôros No. 5, "Alma Brasileira"** (1925)

The name Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) is synonymous with Brazilian art music. Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1887, Villa-Lobos adapted Brazilian styles and popular music to classical techniques and counterpoint. "**Alma Brasileira**" is from a collection of works called the **13 Chôros**, written from 1920 to 1929, which comprise some of Villa-Lobos's most ambitious output. The Chôro (which literally means "I cry" in Portuguese), were songs sung by bands of serenading musicians popular at the turn of the 20th century. Villa-Lobos's Chôros – sophisticated compositions inspired by the traditional chôro – have different orchestrations, ranging from small ensembles such as a flute and clarinet duo, to guitar and full orchestra. **Chôros No. 5, "Alma Brasileira"** (The Soul of Brazil) is written for solo piano.

The somber-hued melody of this work is reminiscent of a traditional love song called the *modinha*; while the jaunty middle section is percussively dancelike, relating to rhythms in the popular repertory at the time. Wrote Villa-Lobos, "What is most interesting in this Chôros are the

rhythmic and melodic cadences...giving the disguised impression of rubato, or of a delayed melodic execution, which is precisely the most interesting characteristic of the serenaders”.

Amy Beach (1867-1944): **Fireflies**, Op. 15 (1892)

Amy Marcy Beach, also known under her published name as Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, was one of America's most prominent composers at the turn of the 1900s. Born in Boston, Amy Beach was a young piano prodigy, with a performance with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at age 18. She published over 300 works of music; and while much of her music is neglected today, there are some gems in the rough. In particular, **Fireflies**, the last work in her **Sketches Op. 15**, was played as an encore by prominent virtuosos of the day such as Josef Hoffmann and Ferruccio Busoni. This showpiece – a double thirds etude – is reminiscent of Chopin's famed double-thirds etude Op. 25 No. 6. Beach inscribes the motto *Naitre avec le printemps, mourir avec les roses* (to be born in the spring, to die with the roses), and in her words, she was inspired to compose by a “profusion of fireflies one summer.”

Margaret Bonds (1913-1972): **Troubled Water** (1967)

Groundbreaking pianist and composer Margaret Allison Richardson Bonds (1913-1972) was born in Chicago. She became the first black American to solo with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, in 1933. As a composer, Bonds wrote music for orchestra, choir, and created arrangements of Negro spirituals, some of which were sung by the legendary soprano Leontyne Price. Bonds's **Credo** for baritone, chorus, and orchestra was performed by the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra under Zubin Mehta shortly after her death.

In **Troubled Water**, Bonds obtains her material from the Negro spiritual “Wade in the Water”. Negro spirituals were a form of secret communication between slaves during the time of the Civil War, and as such, have a powerful emotional history. In describing this work, the distinguished poet Maya Angelou writes:

This beautifully crafted work states the refrain and verse of the spiritual in various guises. The broad sweeping melody is initially spiced up by complex rhythmic accompaniments and harmonized with elements of the blues and jazz. It is then restated in a more languid tempo, beautifully embellished in the gospel tradition of piano performance. This work becomes increasingly more driven, building up to a grand climax with the juxtaposition of the two parts of the refrain “Wade in the Water” and “God’s Gonna Trouble the Water.”

William Bolcom (1938-): **Nine New Bagatelles** (2006)

Michigan-based William Bolcom is one of America’s most prominent and recognized composers. His current compositional output includes eight symphonies, several collections of piano works, cabaret songs, and the monumental **Songs of Innocence and Experience**, an award-winning, three-hour setting of poems of William Blake for soloists, orchestra and choir. An extremely accomplished pianist, Bolcom wrote the **Nine New Bagatelles** for the Friends of Today’s Music Project of the Music Teachers Association of California. These miniature bagatelles are reminiscent of Schumann with their individual inscriptions and sharply-etched characters, always drawn with a knowing wink – playful, brutal, plaintive (like birds), ghostly, sweetly innocent, rhythmic, waltzing (but forgetting), omniscient, and finally, a funeral march. Indeed, Bolcom delights in the macabre at times. In the ghostly bagatelle inscribed (... **Lord Lovell’s trunk**), Bolcom is inspired by the legend of a game of hide-and-seek playing bride, who hides all too well, and is discovered years later as a skeleton in an oak trunk. As written by Thomas Haynes Bayley (1797-1839), the tale ends horrifyingly so:

At length an oak chest, that had long lain hid,
Was found in the castle-they raised the lid,
And a skeleton form lay moldering there
In the bridal wreath of that lady fair!
O, sad was her fate! – in sportive jest

She hid from her lord in the old oak chest.
It closed with a spring! – and, dreadful doom,
The bride lay clasped in her living tomb!

Samuel Barber (1910–1981): **Piano Sonata**, Op. 26 (1949)

Samuel Barber was one of the foremost American composers of the 20th century, and his Sonata Op. 26, championed by the legendary pianist Vladimir Horowitz, is a cornerstone of the piano repertoire. Like Ginastera's Sonata No. 1, the Barber Sonata is also in four movements – but where Ginastera draws inspiration from Argentine folk idioms, Barber draws on tension between twelve tone serialism and tonality, with audible influences of jazz and Copland. Certainly, Barber makes a nod towards serial techniques popular at the time, while remaining firmly entrenched in the tonal camp. The first theme of the opening sonata-allegro movement is energetic and fierce, and based on the motif of a falling minor second. All twelve tones of the chromatic scale are expressed in the opening phrase. The contrasting second theme provides lyrical repose, while retaining rhythmic tension throughout. In the foreboding coda, all twelve tones occur in lightning bursts in the right hand. The scherzo movement – a mad, comic waltz – is a perpetual motion machine that spins brilliantly, while alluding subtly to the opening motif of the first movement. In the slow *Adagio* movement, a passacaglia, Barber constructs the movement using all twelve tones in an ostinato bassline, building to a shattering climax. The finale of the sonata is itself the subject of a well-known story between Horowitz and Barber. Barber had intended to end the sonata after the third movement, but Horowitz insisted on a splashier ending, which Barber was unable to complete. After months of waiting, Horowitz's wife called Barber a “constipated composer” – which became the impetus for Barber to write this brilliant finale – a four-voice fugue – in a single day! The jazzy subject of the fugue is developed using standard fugue techniques – stretto, augmentation, inversion. The climax of the fugue, spanning all registers of the piano, brings this significant work to a powerful end.

Joel Fan, pianist

Acclaimed as “superb” (*The Boston Globe*), “extraordinary” (*The Village Voice*) and a “versatile and sensitive pianist” (*The Washington Post*), Joel Fan combines virtuosity with a gift for lyricism. Mr. Fan began his performing career with the New York Philharmonic at age 11, as a winner of the Philharmonic’s Young People’s Concert Auditions, and has since appeared in recital and with orchestras throughout the world. Fan’s eclectic repertoire spans traditional piano classics and concertos, his own piano transcriptions and cadenzas, and newly commissioned works.

In recent seasons, Fan has performed to critical acclaim with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, London Sinfonietta, Odessa Philharmonic, Santa Fe Pro Musica, Northwest Sinfonietta, Bangor Symphony, Singapore Symphony, and numerous other orchestras, with conductors such as Gustav Meier, David Robertson and Alan Gilbert.

An active recitalist, Fan’s 2008 New York recital at the Metropolitan Museum was hailed by *The New York Times* for his “probing intellect and vivid imagination.” Fan’s debut solo CD *World Keys*, on the Reference Recordings label, reached #3 on Billboard’s Classical Chart. Called a “soaring talent” by *The Los Angeles Times*, he was a prizewinner of several international competitions, such as the D’Angelo Young Artists International Competition in the United States and Busoni International Piano Competition in Italy, and he was named a Presidential Scholar by the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts.

A member of Yo-Yo Ma’s Silk Road Ensemble, Fan has appeared at venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and the television shows Good Morning America and David Letterman, and his work with the Ensemble appears on Sony Classical recordings. Born in New York, Fan began serious piano studies at the Juilliard School, where his teachers included Kathrine Parker of the Pre-College Division, and Martin Canin at the Bowdoin Summer Music Festival. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard University, where his teachers included the composer Leon Kirchner. He also holds a Master of Music degree in Piano Performance from Peabody Conservatory as a student of Leon Fleisher. Mr. Fan is a Steinway artist.

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