

PROGRAM NOTES FOR *RIVER RISING*

Kirsten Volness

1. Alone Together

When Lilit asked me to write her a looping piece for her *Songs of Solitude* recital, I flashed back to moments in my early childhood when I would overdub myself singing onto tape, making goofy sequences that played along with the beats on my little Casio keyboard. Those early covert experiments and the sheer joy of play informed the mood and style of this piece. Roberta Sparrow's last words to Donnie Darko – “every living creature on this earth dies alone” – inspired the title *Alone Together*.

2. Nocturne

Madison Cawein's evocative poem *Nocturne* serves as the jumping off point for my piece of the same name. Through the form of a fantasy, I explore various meanings of “night music” – at times evoking vibrant nightlife, at others the oscillation of long, slow breathing, moving in and out of consciousness and dreaming. I recorded many of the sound sources in the electronic part sitting at the Baldwin Acrosonic that my parents bought from a bar in 1969, from the birds at the window feeder to the less-than-perfect piano I've fallen asleep on numerous occasions throughout my life. I also utilized sounds produced by various objects that happened to be lying nearby, like the game Bananagrams. Special thanks to Josh Lantzy for allowing me to sample his homemade glass marimba.

3. desangramiento

The inspiration for *desangramiento* lies in the tragic feeling one has when receiving horrific news, as though all the blood has suddenly left one's body and an immense implosion of emptiness has replaced it. This image came to mind after reading that 65 million people have been displaced by violence, primarily in the Middle East and Africa (2016 UNHCR report), and another 45.8 million are enslaved around the world (Global Slavery Index 2016). The suffering we cause one another is astounding. The Third Practice Electroacoustic Music Festival commissioned this work, written for Sam Kelder.

4. River Rising

River Rising is an elegy to those who've lost friends, family, livelihoods, and communities – sometimes an entire existence that can never be recovered – to unexpected tragedy. The hopelessness and horror that tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, fires, earthquakes, war, illness, climate change, and other catastrophic forces may bring seems surreal, having never lived through anything like this firsthand. *River Rising* is a reflection on complete overwhelm by situations beyond our control that may only be endured together. Special thanks to Mary Kouyoumdjian for letting me play and sample her beloved Siran.

5. Tree of Life

The *Tree of Life* appears in numerous cultures throughout history and represents the interconnectedness of everything on Earth and in the spirit world, above and below. In the Japanese Shinto tradition, natural features such as waterfalls, mountains, and so on, are believed to house *kami*, or spirits, who bring blessings or mischief to the human realm. *Tree of Life* integrates these ideas by exploring the spirit presences of my favorite types of trees and what they might bring to share in the larger fabric of life, death, the world we can see, and the worlds we may not yet have experienced.

6. Gaia

Gaia is the theory that the earth is essentially a living thing, all of whose components are in dynamic relationship with other life systems. A constant across the many different views of *Gaia* both spiritual and scientific, is that balance must be maintained for life to continue. Inspired by this concept of interrelated change, the piece explores evolutionary dynamic, highlighting the repercussions that arise when human actions threaten the earth's balance.