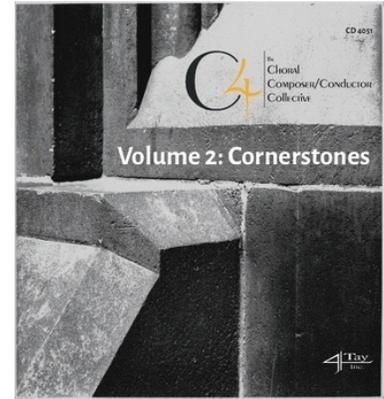




## CD Review by Colin Clarke

### C4 VOLUME 2: Cornerstones • 4TAY 4051 (54:28)

- 1-3 SAYLOR *The Spheres at Play* (Timothy Brown, Cond.)
- 4 ANDOR-ARDÓ *Pitter patter, pitter patter; and then* (Timothy Brown, Cond.)
- 5 J. N. RUBINSTEIN *How she went to Ireland* (Martha Sullivan, Cond.)
- 6 DELLAIRA *The Campers at Kitty Hawk* (Billy Janiszewski, Cond.)
- 7 CROCKETT *Daglarym/My Mountains* (Daniel Andor-Ardó, Cond.)
- 8 M. SULLIVAN *Tyger, Tyger!* (Nathaniel Barnett, Cond.)
- 9 G. WILLIAMSON *Tape Recorder* (Perry Townsend, Cond.)
- 10 SHEPPARD *Love is Anterior to Life* (Colin Britt, Cond.)
- 11-13 HERSANT *7Allégories* (Colin Britt, Cond.)



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All of the repertoire on this disc is taken from C4's 2015–16 season, which may go some way to explaining the unanimity and the freshness of the performances. The choral group C4 specializes in music written within the last quarter century; it is a project the members clearly are passionate about. In addition to the booklet notes to the current, excellent, release, there are additional materials available online at [c4ensemble.org/cornerstones.html](https://c4ensemble.org/cornerstones.html).

The piece by Bruce Saylor, *The Spheres at Play*, sets poems by Emily Dickinson. As Saylor quite correctly says, Dickinson “creates a soundworld of her own”; Saylor’s response is infinitely pliable. The outer movements are rhythmically dynamic (“There came a wind like a bugle” and “Musicians wrestle everywhere”), while the vocal sighs of the central “Put up my lute!” offer delicious contrast.

The hypnotic “pitter patters” of Daniel Andor-Ardó’s *Pitter patter, pitter patter; and then* provide a choral bed for upper voice activity. Playing with Minimalist elements without fully embracing the philosophy (decide yourself whether this is a good thing or not), Andor-Ardó’s setting of a text by Zsuzsanna Ardó’s text tackles the present-day refugee issue by referencing legend and fairytale.

(Cont.)

Joseph N. Rubinstein’s *How she went to Ireland* (the text is by Thomas Hardy) is described by its composer as a “glacial Irish jig.” I hear the glacial part, but am less sure of the jig element. There is however a palpable sense of loss and regret here, a sense of hopelessness. All credit to C4’s ladies for their seemingly effortless sustaining of the high top line for extended periods.

It is touching how, to composer Michael Dellaira, the Dos Passos portraits (in *The Big Money*) of the Wright Brothers represent for him “the promise of American progress, a blend of science, utility and risk.” Heard as itself a type of choral patter song, *The Campers at Kitty Hawk* is

terrifically entertaining. Here one can hear the result of hard work in rehearsal paying off; the piece stands or falls by knife-edge precision of delivery, and it works beautifully.

Using fragments from folk melodies from Tuva (an autonomous republic of the Russian Federation that borders Mongolia) to evoke that area's large spaces, Donald Crockett's *Daglarym/My Mountains* is a lovely piece. Although not utilizing throat singing of the region, altered vocal sounds are used effectively; there is much beauty here, the chordal structures well balanced in this performance.

Herself an experienced performer of new vocal music, composer Martha Sullivan sets Blake's famous text "*Tyger, Tyger!*" predominantly in the Lydian mode with great imagination.

Taking a poem by Zoe Skoulding, *Tape Recorder*, Gordon Williamson uses tape techniques (splicing, cutting, speed changes) to elongate and explore a 15- to 20-second reading into a piece that lasts just under five minutes. Those who remember the falling pitches of ailing tapes might well take a trip back in time here. It is a fascinating idea, not one that bears a huge number of repetitions but stimulating nonetheless.

More Emily Dickinson is on tap for Bettina Sheppard's *Love is Anterior to Life*. The "choppy" nature of the poem (Sheppard's description) is mirrored brilliantly in this setting. The text is itself "chopped up," with only the basses singing the entire poem (at the other end of the scale, the altos only sing the word "love"). The piece only lasts two minutes but presents some of the most memorable music of the disc.

Finally, Philippe Hersant's *Allégories* presents settings of three of Rimbaud's Illuminations. The first movement, "Enfance III," is clearly the setting of a master, dignified and confident. The choir C4 finds the hypnotic aspect of the bell-like background accompaniment to perfection. There is grace aplenty in the central "Jeunesse III (vingt ans)," which leads straight into the final "Départ," where harmonies brighten to provide a perfect sense of climax to the recital.

The mastery of Hersant's writing is a fitting way to end a most stimulating and rewarding disc. The recording could perhaps have stood a touch more reverb (it is slightly dry), but lovers of choral music need not hesitate. Colin Clarke

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