TAKÁCS ASSAD LABRO
J and Helen Schlichting, executive producers
YARLUNG RECORDS
BOB ATTIYEH, PRODUCER

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1	Bryce Dessner	*Circles*	5:49
2	Clarice Assad	*Luminous*, from *Pendulum Suite*	4:43
3	Julien Labro	*Meditation No. 1*	8:22
4	Milton Nascimento	*Cravo e Canela*	5:27
5	Clarice Assad	*Constellation* *Celestial* *Estrellita* *Solais*	11:36
6	Kaija Saariaho	*Nocturne*	5:24
7	Clarice Assad	*Clash*	12:34

overleaf: Clarice Assad, Marcelo Macaue photography

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PRODUCER'S NOTES

My friend **Clarice Assad** called me out of the blue a few months after our album *Confessions* earned a GRAMMY® nomination. Clarice had written the title tracks on the album, which Laura Strickling sang magnificently. "Bob," Clarice said, "I have an idea…." I have learned that anytime Clarice has an idea, I'm interested. "I wrote a piece for **Takács Quartet** and bandoneón virtuoso **Julien Labro**. It's a wild piece. The five of them have been performing it all over the world on tour, and I think you would like it. Actually, I know you would like it. Julien wrote a companion piece, and the third work is by **Bryce Dessner**. I think you know Bryce; he lives in Paris. What a trio!" I responded that it sounded wonderful. "I want you to record these three works, plus another piece I have in mind for violin and piano. When can we do it?"

Hence began one of Yarlung's most adventurous (and I hope you will agree, successful) collaborations in the label's nineteen year history.

My first two calls were to Yarlung underwriters **Raulee Marcus** who has worked with Yarlung on several projects, and executive producer **J Schlichting** who serves on Yarlung's board of directors. Raulee and I brainstormed about how we might record this album at the University of Colorado, Takács' home base in Boulder. Initially that worked best for the Quartet's schedule. J and his wife Helen agreed to underwrite much of the album and serve as executive producers, as well as commission a new work by Clarice for Takács violinist Harumi Rhodes with Clarice on piano. After a few more phone calls, Harumi asked that we move the recording to Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa where the quartet performs often, and where Yarlung has made so many successful recordings. Aaron Egigian found an opening on April 12th and 13th, 2023 in Samueli Theater at Segerstrom and the excitement started to build. Raulee made calls

overleaf: Julien Labro, Jim Lennon photography

and did her underwriting consortium magic to encourage other close friends to fund the remaining costs for the project, fly our five musicians to California and even pick them up from the airport. Raulee makes things happen.

As I began to assemble these liner notes, I wanted to learn more about how the three works for quintet originated. Julien had been the catalyst and coordinated the commissions. So I spoke with Julien between rehearsals with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Julien was in Massachusetts, preparing to reprise the BSO's prior summer's success at Tanglewood performing Arturs Maskats' *Tango for Symphony Orchestra*. Andris Nelsons was conducting, and his talent was making Julien overjoyed.

Julien lives inside the music he plays, and we spoke at length about how much he liked the orchestra members, their music director, and the acoustics from the stage in Boston before we focused on our Segerstrom Center recording project and how the "three big pieces" for bandoneón and string quartet came together for our Yarlung recording.

Several years ago Michael Kondziolka, former Vice President of Programming and Production at UMS in Ann Arbor, and Marna Seltzer, Director of Princeton University Concerts (both of whom have worked with the Takács over several decades) asked Julien Labro and the Takács if they would like to collaborate on a Music Accord commission. Music Accord* collaborates with classical music presenters to foster the creation of chamber music. Other members of the consortium for this exciting project were 92NY, Kennedy Center, Krannert Center, Middlebury Performing Arts Series, Celebrity Series of Boston, The Broad Stage and San Francisco Performances. Labro is a world famous French accordion player based in New York, but he is also known for his virtuosity on bandoneón, which he wanted to feature with string quartet in these new compositions. Julien had worked with several string quartets but the consortium recommended a fresh collaboration with Takács Quartet. Julien wasn't sure they would have time or inclination but Michael made the initial outreach and to Julien's delight, Takács said yes.

* musicaccord.org

Next, Julien and Takács musicians Ed, Harumi, András and Richard came up with a short list of composers. Two of the finest on this list were Clarice Assad and Bryce Dessner.

Julien had not met Clarice at the time, but he knew and loved Clarice's musical trajectory, including her chamber music, larger orchestra works, her performances with her illustrious father and her collaborations with Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg.

During our recording sessions, Julien remarked several times how "hands on" Clarice had been during the composing process, calling repeatedly to run ideas past him, ask advice and brainstorm technical solutions for the vast landscape of music she envisioned for the five instruments. Even before he heard the results, Julien predicted that *Clash* would be a winner.

Julien had met Bryce Dessner several years earlier from a collaboration with Bryce and members of Eighth Blackbird on the movie score for *The Two Popes*. Julien knew Bryce was a successful American rock musician and guitarist based in Paris, but also recognized Dessner's stature in the classical new music world and wanted very much to ask Bryce to write a piece for him and Takács. Julien hoped and anticipated that Bryce's piece would explore a radically different musical language from that which Clarice would pursue in *Clash*. *Circles*, our opening track on the album, was Dessner's fabulous result.

Julien had not initially intended to write a piece for himself and the quartet, but Takács wanted new music to fill at least half of the slated concerts. At their request, Julien shared some of his prior compositions for bandoneón and string quartet, and Julien had written *Meditation No. 1* during the pandemic. After reading the score Harumi and Ed thought the contrasting nature of the work would fit in beautifully within the rest of the concert program. Ed emailed Julien "we all really like your Meditation piece. Beautiful!" Lucky for us and lucky for Yarlung!

overleaf: Takács Quartet performing in Verdun, Ian Malkin photography

Julien's ***Meditation No. 1***, track 3 on our album, continues the trajectory initiated by Astor Piazzolla and Dino Saluzzi when they launched the bandoneón beyond its earlier role in Argentine folk music. As he prepared for our recording project, Julien told me he enjoyed thinking about the ECM bandoneón recordings released during the 1970s and 80s by Manfred Eicher.

Takács Quartet:

Edward Dusinberre and **Harumi Rhodes**, violins, **András Fejér**, cello; **Richard O'Neill**, viola

This album helps honor and celebrate the upcoming 50th Anniversary of the extraordinary Takács Quartet, formed in 1975 at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest by Gabor Takács-Nagy, Károly Schranz, Gabor Ormai and András Fejér. András remains cellist to this day. He was one of the original music student founders of the quartet, which would become one of the highest-ranked and best-loved string quartets in history. The group received its first international attention in 1977, winning First Prize and the Critics' Prize at the International String Quartet Competition in Evian, France. The Quartet also won the Gold Medal at the 1978 Portsmouth and Bordeaux Competitions and First Prizes at the Budapest International String Quartet Competition in 1978 and the Bratislava Competition in 1981. The Quartet made its North American debut tour in 1982. Today's members of the Takács Quartet are Artists-in-Residence at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

Richard

Edward

The Takács originally recorded for Hungaroton and later for Decca, for whom they released many recordings including award-winning interpretations of the Bartók and Beethoven String Quartets. The ensemble now records for Hyperion and has released an extraordinary discography including works by Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn, Schubert, Brahms, Coleridge-Taylor, Dvořák, Hough, Dutilleux and Ravel. This release is the Quartet's first Yarlung album.

I mentioned my friendship with Clarice Assad in the opening paragraph of these notes. I always enjoy writing about Clarice and her music.

J and Helen Schlichting kindly enabled Yarlung to commission ***Constellation***, a three movement work for violin and piano, performed together in this recording on track 5. Clarice wrote for Harumi on violin and for herself on piano. The work celebrates Clarice's nuclear family of four. Clarice directs that the movements can be played in any order. In our case, Harumi and Clarice perform ***Celestial*** first, in which Clarice envisions Stella, her as yet unborn daughter, still in the womb when Clarice composed it. (Stella was very much with us at the time of this recording.) Clarice's instinct told her something of what beautiful Stella would be like. She arrived peacefully and possessed a sense of calm that Clarice confessed she had never encountered before. ***Estrellita*** (Little Star) comes next, a movement Clarice wrote as a children's song for Antonia, Clarice's older daughter, a little fireball of energy. "Antonia is like a shooting star, with bright eyes and a personality that fills our entire

universe with excitement and bright colors." This performance ends with ***Solais*** (Sunshine) a movement which pays homage and celebrates Clarice's partner, evoking a sense of eternal, lasting love. It emanates warmth as this slow pulsating force sustains us, the revolving celestial bodies dancing around it in awe and gratitude. Thank you Harumi and Clarice for painting such a happy domestic musical picture for us, and thank you J and Helen for your generous commission.

Luminous, track 2 on our album, explodes with Clarice's interpretation of the life-affirming power of Brazilian jazz. The percussive piano introduction launches the listener into the joyous syncopated rhythms and arching melodic lines associated with the genre. *Luminous* alternates duple and triplet sections in rondo form to drive the musical dialogue to a breathless and ecstatic conclusion, a celebration of life and music. Clarice, performing both voice and piano in this version, wrote *Luminous* as part of her *Pendulum Suite*.

Cravo e Canela (Clove and Cinnamon) follows on track 4. This is a song by **Milton Nascimento**, one of Brazil's most celebrated songwriters. **Ronaldo Bastos** wrote the Portuguese lyrics and the two created a classic Brazilian song that captures the essence of romance and the vivid colors of Brazil's cultural tapestry. Clarice's arrangement and performance breathes fresh energy into the song through her improvisation and innovative vocal techniques. (Clarice didn't want to leave *all* the extended techniques on this album to her instrument-playing friends.) Here she explores vocal techniques that push the boundaries of her beautiful voice. This was a treat to record, as I think you will understand when you listen.

Bryce Dessner's *Circles* for String Quartet and Bandoneón opens our album on track 1. Bryce wrote that he was "fortunate to meet the wonderful bandoneón and accordion player Julien Labro a few years ago while I was composing the music for the Fernando Mereilles film, *The Two Popes*. I wrote a lot of music for Julien to play in the movie and was completely blown away by his exceptional musicianship and virtuosity. He seems to literally be able to do and play anything. So when Julien reached out and offered a chance to compose for him and the equally wonderful Takács Quartet, I was very happy."

Bryce wrote *Circles* during the many months of Covid-19 lockdown in France. "This piece was an expression of the creative process slowly starting to turn again and come alive despite my isolation, each individual voice searching for a line and searching for one another and eventually creating a dance pattern together, weaving in and out of their evolving collective rhythm and individualist polyphony. This theme of the individual versus the collective voice is something I have been exploring a lot in my recent work."

Clarice's ***Clash***, our final track on the album, is the hardest to describe. Perhaps also the hardest to play, but I will leave that to the musicians to decide. Clarice has been increasingly interested in tensions within the social fabric of our society, especially as exacerbated by incendiary politicians, climate change, mass migration and refugee issues. Indeed her opera, *Isolda/Tristão*, which premiered in São Paulo this past September, adjusts the story line we know from Wagner and the

narrative of his 11th century predecessors to focus on refugees caught between the borders of two countries, and perhaps the borders between two states of existence.

Clash is not program music and does not tell a specific story or illuminate a specific argument. But it does embody some of these same social struggles as expressed by the string quartet and bandoneón as these five instruments explore states of discord. "I started writing *Clash* in 2020 and finished in 2021, a turbulent period for many of us, made more painful by our world-wide health crisis and its subsequent social distancing, the potential collapse of our economy, riots and political turmoil, all stressful occurrences." Clarice experimented with rhythmic ideas she took from human speech, especially argumentative speech, and contrasts those with patterns evolving out of human conflict resolution. Challenging as the work may sound at first, its beauty emerges as the stronger and unifying force, giving us hope for the future. As with all the music in this album, this too was recorded in one take.

As Yarlung fans know, we record complete takes of movements and don't like to surgically correct or "improve" the music created by our artists. This proves especially fraught when musicians tackle new and extremely challenging repertoire. Indeed, when musicians learn that Yarlung is serious about releasing "real" music as they in fact play it, many run away as fast as they can. By contrast, Clarice, Julien and the members of Takács Quartet said they relished the approach, challenging as it might be. I greatly appreciate their achievement and the results.

I still remember the expression on **Baird Dodge**'s face when he and **Color Field Quartet** came to record the **James Matheson String Quartet** in Samueli Theater with us. (The Matheson project was the first Yarlung album for which J and Helen served as executive producers). Baird knew the drill but wasn't sure he believed me. The first eighteen-minute movement was basically unplayable in a single take, even by Baird and his extraordinary Color Field Quartet. After about eight attempts, we cheated by recording the final coda, separated in the score by a nice fat *fermata* that follows the first part of the movement. The plan was to then record the first 17 or so minutes and treat the coda as a separate movement from an editing perspective. The musicians captured a perfect coda, and then we returned to the opening. I did ask that they keep playing through the coda to the end, however. That next take, which included the entire first movement, was the best performance of all parts of the moment, *including* the coda. *That* is the take you hear on the Matheson recording.

Harumi has always loved the music of **Kaija Saariaho** and suggested recording her ***Nocturne*** for solo violin as a part of this project. Saariaho wrote *Nocturne* in 1994 in preparation for her violin concerto Graal théâtre. She dedicated *Nocturne* to Witold Lutosławski. I knew that Saariaho was struggling with terminal brain cancer and she died on June 2nd, 2023. I loved her and miss her and dedicate this album to Kaija Saariaho, her husband Jean-Baptiste Barrière, and their wonderful family.

Our musicians join me in thanking our executive producers **Helen and J Schlichting**. We also greatly appreciate **Raulee Marcus** and our team of valiant underwriters including **Don Pattison**, **Ann Horton**, **Aaron Egigian**, **David Leavenworth**, **Joel and Shayne Marine**, **Chip and Sharyn Moore** and **Stephen A. Block**. You are terrific friends and visionaries and we are grateful to you for making this great music available to the public.

Fellow recording engineer and equipment designer **Arian Jansen** and I used SonoruS Holographic Imaging technology in the analog domain to refine the stereo image, Yarlung's SonoruS ATR12 to record Agfa-formula 468 analog tape, the Merging Technologies HAPI to record 256fs DSD in stereo and surround sound and the SonoruS ADC to record PCM. We used our friend **Ted Ancona**'s AKG C24 microphone previously owned by Frank Sinatra, and Yarlung Audio vacuum tube microphone amplification designed and built for us by **Elliot Midwood**. It is always a pleasure to record in Samueli Theater at Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, with beautiful and adjustable natural acoustics which enable us to capture our musicians' brilliance just as they create it. Many thanks to our friends **Aaron Egigian** and **David Leavenworth** at Segerstrom Center for enabling us to work in this space. When you play this album, you can hear what Arian and I heard in the hall during our recording sessions. We "mix and master" using microphone placement and hall adjustments. This means that no post production is necessary in a concert hall this beautiful, working with musicians and friends of this caliber.

Thank you!

--Bob Attiyeh, producer

Arian Jansen

Our musicians give sincere thanks to our friends whose contributions made this release possible:

J and Helen Schlichting
Raulee Marcus
Don Pattison
Ann Horton
Aaron Egigian
David Leavenworth
Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Joel and Shayne Marine
Chip and Sharyn Moore
Stephen A. Block

J Schlichting backing up video with video assistant Mike Rosell cheering him on

overleaf: Takács Quartet, Amanda Tipton Photography

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J and Helen Schlichting

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AKG C24 microphone: Ancona Audio

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Amanda Tipton Photography

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overleaf: Clarice Assad, Marcelo Macaue photography

back cover: Julien Labro, Jim Lennon photography

TAKÁCS ASSAD LABRO

Clarice Assad
Bryce Dessner
Julien Labro
Milton Nascimento
Kaija Saariaho

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