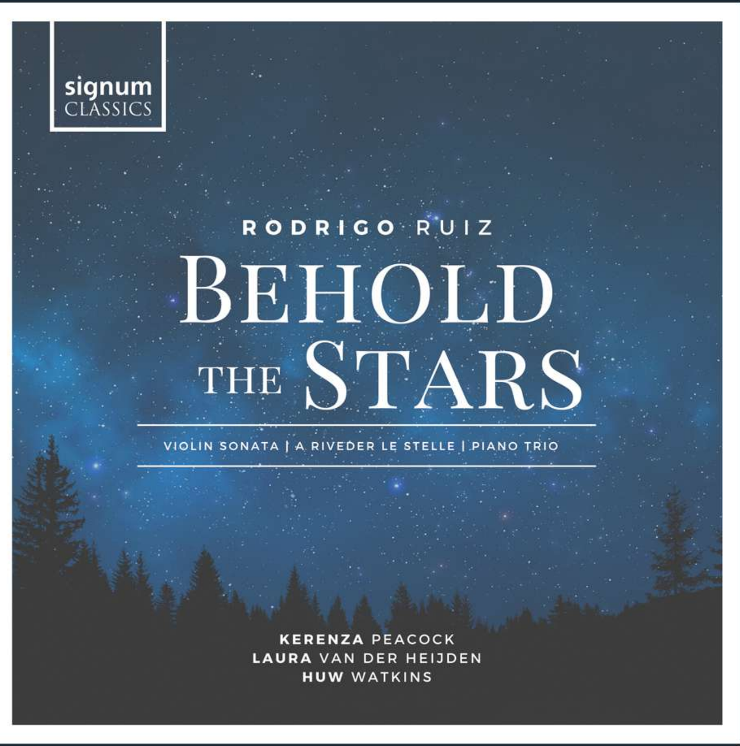

BEHOLD THE STARS

RODRIGO RUIZ (b.1988)

	SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO · F MAJOR · R.6		**22'47**
	Commissioned by Kerenza Peacock		
1	I	Adagio – Allegro assai	7'45
2	II	Andante sostenuto	3'50
3	III	Allegro con fuoco	4'49
4	IV	Adagio ed intimo	6'23
5	**A RIVEDER LE STELLE** · D MINOR · R.8		**8'21**
	Commissioned by Kerenza Peacock		
	TRIO FOR VIOLIN, CELLO AND PIANO · A MAJOR · R.9		**27'11**
6	I	Allegro	7'43
7	II	Allegro agitato	5'33
8	III	Tema e varizioni	13'55

Tema – Andante
Var. I – Allegretto grazioso
Var. II – (Lo stesso tempo)
Var. III – Minore
Var. IV – Adagio
Var. V – Allegro mosso
Var. VI – Adantino comodo
Var. VII – Allegro vivace
Finale – (Lo stesso tempo)

TOTAL: **58'25**

KERENZA PEACOCK VIOLIN
LAURA VAN DER HEIJDEN CELLO
HUW WATKINS PIANO

www.rodrigoruiz.com www.signumrecords.com

INTERVIEW WITH RODRIGO RUIZ

by **JESSICA** DUCHEN

OCTOBER 2020

Rodrigo Ruiz waves to me on the Zoom screen from his former home in Mexico. There he and his wife found themselves in lockdown when the pandemic struck earlier this year. Normally their base is Rome: **'We were visiting family and fortunately have been able to stay with them,'** Rodrigo says – and it is from this distance that he must watch the release of this recording, the second-ever album devoted to his somewhat unusual music.

The unsuspecting listener might be surprised to find a 32-year-old composer writing in 2020 along tonal musical principles that were second nature some two centuries ago.

COMPOSITION IS A MATTER OF ONE BIG PRINCIPLE: CAUSE AND EFFECT.

The programme in this album clearly shows Rodrigo´s roots in the traditions of Beethoven and Brahms, but with individual twists that clearly indicate we are in fact on new territory. 'It's the music that comes naturally to me; I find that tonal music speaks to me very directly. After all, even the most inexperienced listener can perfectly enjoy a Mozart sonata with no need for sophisticated analyses. That's important to me because I think music does have a very special power, part of which is to be able to transform the world around us and our own inner worlds.'

Francesco Telli remains his sole composition mentor – other than Beethoven. 'To make up for lack of a teacher in my childhood, I always said if you want to learn, go to the best, and to me Beethoven is the best!' Rodrigo´s close study of Beethoven has informed his own musical choices, frequently in ways that present an intriguing reinterpretation of these methods. 'We're constantly told that Beethoven broke the rules,' he says, 'but I think that often those rules have been suggested with hindsight. I see it more as a matter of one big principle: cause and effect. Everything he writes depends on that.

'I also find the concept of dissonance to be rather limiting and misleading. It is more helpful to think of expansion and contraction – the whole universe expands and contracts. Our own process of breathing, our very life cycle, are small iterations of this universal principle. When a note that did not exist in the home key comes into play, it is better understood as an expansion of that micro-universe, and not as a dissonance that irrupts into it.'

These concepts are at the core of what Rodrigo aims for in his own music, which emerges diatonic rather than chromatic, yet often giving the impression that it is unfurling unexpected growth from a modest starting point.

The three works in this recording were written in 2017–19 and all feature the violinist Kerenza Peacock as a guiding force. The Violin Sonata sprang from her specific request, if with a twist: 'Kerenza asked me to write a piece for her,' says Rodrigo, 'but actually she specified that it should not be a sonata. She really wanted a short,

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piece but fortunately she is a great friend who lets me get away with these things.' It was Kerenza, too, who according to Rodrigo asked for the work's most unusual feature: the scordatura in which the instrument's G string is tuned down a tone lower than usual, to a bottom F, lending the work's soundworld an extra depth and darkness.

The sonata is a substantial piece in four movements. After a slow introduction and lyrical first movement with pastoral atmosphere, there comes a recitativo that Rodrigo decided would offer a necessary contrast at this point. The busy, Schumannesque third movement is deceptive, tricking the ear into expecting it to be a finale. The true conclusion, however, is the slow movement proper, ending the work on a note of beauty and transformation. 'The central idea,' says Rodrigo, 'came from the image of a starry night by a lake transforming into dawn. But of course that image isn't necessary. Everyone should simply enjoy the music in their own way.' It is an image, nonetheless, that attracts him strongly; his first CD was entitled *An Everlasting Dawn*, in which he writes: 'Night gives way to day, sadness to joy, defeat to hope and death to rebirth.'

To make up for not having produced initially the short work which Kerenza had asked, Rodrigo elected to write *A riveder le stelle*. This, unusually for a violin and piano work, is accompanied by poetic quotations: the piece was inspired by the Canto XXXIV of Dante's 'Inferno'. 'Literature is another great passion of mine,' Rodrigo says, 'and I often try to unite it with music.' Indeed, he is currently studying for a doctorate on the subject of mythology and hints that he has

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potential operas in the pipeline for which he is writing his own libretti.

The main theme of this piece is conceived as a setting of the words '*Vexila regis prodeunt inferno*', announcing the inexorable approach of Lucifer's standards through the mists. 'I tried to recreate the idea of that misty expanse, suggested in Dante's poem,' Rodrigo says. 'Then I break up the themes: he's hearing it first at a distance and I imagined what it would be like to hear it in a great cavern from far away, where you can't see very well, you hear bits of it, there's an echo...' The result is a rapt, bleak, inward piece that exploits a range of expressive violinistic effects, including natural harmonics and *col legno* bowing.

Last, but by no means least, the Piano Trio calls to mind the rich, robust harmonies of Brahms. It is, says Rodrigo, an entirely abstract work, rather than possessing an underlying programme, and like many of his pieces it started life as a piano improvisation. Central to its organic language are the motifs of a falling third (hence, perhaps, the "Brahmsiness" of its sound) and key relationships based on the interval of a second. Nevertheless, it was not Brahms but, once more, Beethoven that provided the chief model, notably Rodrigo's study of the modulation schemes in the Piano Sonata, op. 53, the 'Waldstein', in which ambiguous twists and turns of context affect the way that harmonic relationships are perceived and in which, as ever, nothing happens by accident. As in the Violin Sonata, the opening movement is spacious and songful; there follows a vigorous scherzo in the minor, which also has a

AN INVIGORATING UPDATE OF AN EVER-POPULAR CLASSICAL FORMAT.

Brahmsian flavour with vivid syncopations and light-fingered piano arpeggios.

The final movement consists of a theme and character variations on a lavish scale. Rodrigo remarks that the variation form is not a natural favourite for him; he still seems slightly surprised at his own inclination towards using it here. 'I came up with a theme in A major that was thematically connected to the first movement,' he says, 'and while improvising on it I was particularly pleased with an idea that became the variation in which the piano is the most prominent instrument, appearing near the end after the Adagio. In order to accommodate this, I chose variation form for the movement.' Nevertheless, the variations are not numbered and the form is relatively relaxed and flexible: 'Some variations are more defined than others,' Rodrigo says, laughing. This typically invigorating update of an ever-popular classical format brings the trio to a rousing conclusion.

—

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CANTO XXXIV

DALL' INFERNO DI DANTE

"Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni
verso di noi; però dinanzi mira",
disse 'l maestro mio, "se tu 'l discerni".

Come quando una grossa nebbia spira,
o quando l'emisperio nostro annotta,
par di lungi un molin che 'l vento gira,

veder mi parve un tal dificio allotta;
poi per lo vento mi ristrinsi retro
al duca mio, ché non lì era altra grotta.

Già era, e con paura il metto in metro,
là dove l'ombre tutte eran coperte,
e trasparien come festuca in vetro.

Quando noi fummo fatti tanto avante,
ch'al mio maestro piacque di mostrarmi
la creatura ch'ebbe il bel sembiante,

d'innanzi mi si tolse e fé restarmi,
"Ecco Dite", dicendo, "ed ecco il loco
ove convien che di fortezza t'armi".

Lo 'mperador del doloroso regno
da mezzo 'l petto uscia fuor de la ghiaccia.

"Ma la notte risurge, e oramai
è da partir, ché tutto avem veduto".

"Attienti ben, ché per cotali scale",
disse 'l maestro, ansando com'uom lasso,
"conviensi dipartir da tanto male".

Poi uscì fuor per lo fóro d'un sasso
e puose me in su l'orlo a sedere;
appresso porse a me l'accorto passo.

Io levai li occhi e credetti vedere
Lucifero com'io l'avea lasciato,
e vidili le gambe in sù tenere.

Luogo è là giù da Belzebù remoto
tanto quanto la tomba si distende,
che non per vista, ma per suono è noto

d'un ruscelleto che quivi discende.

Lo duca e io per quel cammino ascoso
intrammo a ritornar nel chiaro mondo;
e sanza cura aver d'alcun riposo,

salimmo sù, el primo e io secondo,
tanto ch'i' vidi de le cose belle
che porta 'l ciel, per un pertugio tondo.

E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle.

—

Dante Alighieri, La "Commedia" secondo l'antica vulgata. II. "Inferno", a cura di Giorgio Petrocchi, Firenze, Le Lettere, 1994, voll. 4, pp. 636, 642, 628, 660 (Le Opere di Dante Alighieri. Edizione Nazionale a cura della Società Dantesca Italiana, 7) [Edizione riveduta della Società Dantesca italiana].

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CANTO XXXIV

FROM DANTE´S INFERNO

"The standards of the King of Hell
advance towards us; but look before us,"
said my master, "if you discern it."

As, when a thick mist expires
or when the hemisphere of ours is night,
afar a mill appears the wind doth turn;

I seemed to see such a structure then;
then, for the wind, I shrank back
behind my guide; for there was no other cave.

I already was, and fearful set it in meter,
there where the shades all were covered,
and showed through as fescue in glass.

When we had made so much ahead
that it pleased my master to show me
the creature that once had the beauteous semblance,

before me he removed himself, and made me stay,
"Behold Dis", saying, "and behold the place where
you ought to arm yourself with strength."

The emperor of the doleful reign
from the chest's midpoint came from the ice.

"But the night rises anew; and now
'tis time to leave, for we have all seen."

"Hold fast, for by such stairs,"
said the master, panting as a weary man,
"we ought to depart from so much evil."

Then he came forth by a breach in the rock,
and laid me sitting on the rim;
afterwards he offered me his prudent step.

I raised the eyes, and thought to see
Lucifer as I had left him;
and saw his legs held up above.

There is a place down below, from Beelzebub remote
so much, as much as the tomb extends,
that not by sight, but by sound is known,

of a streamlet that there descends.

The guide and I on that concealed path
entered to return to the clear world;
and without thought of all repose,

we climbed up, he first and I second,
so much that I saw the beauteous things
that heaven carries, through a round crack.

We then emerged to behold the stars again.

—

Translated by Rodrigo Ruiz.

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RODRIGO RUIZ

Rodrigo Ruiz was raised in Tijuana, Mexico, where he enjoyed playing with his friends, as all children do, but also loved music and literature. Although barely able to reach the keyboard, he was drawn to a small Steinway spinet that his great-grandfather had gifted his mother for her twelfth birthday. While studying piano under Zarema Tchibirova, and only fifteen at the time, he wrote his first piano sonata, which later received the Outstanding Composition Prize (2008) by the state of Baja California.

Even if many of his early compositions were naturally works for solo piano, his creative efforts also extend into the realm of art song and chamber music. One of his most recent compositions, *Venus & Adonis*, a song cycle commissioned by Grace Davidson after Shakespeare's homonymous poem, was sparked by their collaboration in *An Everlasting Dawn*, Rodrigo's first album, released independently in 2017 after a successful crowdfunding campaign, which also featured Christopher Glynn and Alison Farr.

An avid reader of classics, he is currently preparing his own Italian translation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* which will be the basis for a new opera libretto, early sketches of which already populate his sketchbook next to drafts for a string quartet. After earning his Bachelor of Music *cum laude* from Lawrence University, Rodrigo was offered a scholarship at University of Michigan's orchestral conducting programme where he completed his Master's in 2014. During this time he was assistant conductor in the recording of Milhaud's *L'Orestie d'Eschyle* for Naxos Records, a project that was nominated for the 2015 Grammy Awards for Best Opera Recording.

RODRIGO IS INVESTIGATING NOVEL WAYS TO FUSE MUSIC AND MYTH THROUGH GENRE-DEFYING WORKS.

Rodrigo is now pursuing a Ph.D. in Mythological Studies at Pacifica Graduate Institute, investigating novel ways to fuse music and myth through opera, oratorio, masses, programmatic music, and other genre-defying works, such as *Tattvas*, a five-work project 'for orchestra and elemental nature', as he likes to call it, which crowds his piano and writing desk; in it, each of the five elements of the ancient world – earth, water, fire, air and ether – are portrayed through an orchestra, ethnic instruments, and pre-recorded sounds and effects.

In his spare time Rodrigo takes joy in hiking the outdoors, reading, and cooking for family and friends.

—

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KERENZA PEACOCK

Kerenza has enjoyed an ongoing collaboration with composer Oliver Davis and is the soloist on six albums of his works for solo violin and orchestra. Recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, *Flight*, *Dance*, *Liberty* and *Arcadia* are played on radio stations across the world, and have reached top positions in the classical charts. *Seasons*, which included Kerenza directing Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* from the violin, was picked as Album of the Week on Classic FM. *Solace*, the most recent album in this series, was released in March 2021.

Kerenza led the Pavão String Quartet on five albums and 15 years of tours throughout the world. A disc of quartets by Bax and Elgar was welcomed as 'a real winner' from 'an ensemble of real depth and musical distinction' (*Classic FM Magazine*), with 'an intoxicating warmth and emotional spontaneity' (*The Strad Magazine*). *Music Web International* christened it disc of the month, 'an unqualified success – a real must-have!' The Pavão Quartet played on Eric Whitacre's *Light and Gold* album, which won a Grammy Award in 2012.

Kerenza's debut solo disc was the world premiere recording of the Holbrooke Violin Concerto for Naxos, praised in *Gramophone Magazine* for her 'lithe, elegant violin-playing and her easy conquest of the virtuoso demands.' She was a regular concerto soloist in London's St. Martin in the Fields, before moving to Los Angeles where she records for TV and film.

Kerenza enjoys playing different fiddle styles. She played fiddle and sang in alt-bluegrass band, The Coal Porters and wrote two songs on their last album. Kerenza has played on many soundtracks, including *Downton Abbey*, *Charlie's Angels* and Pixar's *Onward*. The huge number of artists she has recorded with include Paul McCartney, Noel Gallagher, and Kanye West. At one point she played on all Top 3 Albums in the Pop Charts, at the same time as on the Classical no. 1. In 2016 she completed a year-long global tour with Adele, as concertmaster. She performs on the latest albums by Barbra Streisand, Jon Bon Jovi, Celine Dion and Madonna.

© John Clark

Kerenza was appointed an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music for making a 'significant contribution to the music industry.' Her first classical composition was recently released, after being premiered in St Martin-in-the-Fields. *Rainbow* is scored for solo violin and string orchestra.

Rodrigo Ruiz and Kerenza have enjoyed a long friendship. She was very excited for him to write for the violin.

—

LAURA VAN DER HEIJDEN

Hailed by the *Guardian* as a 'thoughtful artist with much to say', Laura van der Heijden has emerged as one of the leading cellists of her generation, captivating audiences and critics alike with the sensitivity of her sound and interpretations. She can already look back on a number of exceptional achievements, among them being the winner of the BBC Young Musician competition, and performing with such distinguished musicians as Sir Andrew Davis, Karl-Heinz Steffens, Kirill Karabits, Huw Watkins, Krzysztof Chorzelski, and the Brodsky Quartet. In 2016 Laura was chosen by the Orpheum Stiftung in Switzerland, a foundation encouraging and assisting exceptionally talented young instrumental soloists. Under this umbrella she appeared in recital with Fazil Say at Zürich Tonhalle.

Laura's 2018 debut album *1948*, featuring Russian music for cello and piano with pianist Petr Limonov, won the 2018 Edison Klassiek Award (broadcast live on Dutch TV), and the 2019 BBC Music Magazine Newcomer Award. The CD has been hailed as a 'dazzling, imaginative and impressive' debut recording.

The 2019/20 season saw her perform with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales in Aldeburgh, the Tchaikovsky Symphony in Moscow, the Prague Symphony, the London Philharmonic and BBC Philharmonic Orchestras.

In the past few years, Laura has performed with leading orchestras such as the Philharmonia, the Hallé Orchestra, the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, the Royal Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony, as well as the European Union Chamber and English Chamber Orchestras. She has also given debuts in Holland, Germany, New Zealand, and in Australia with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in the opening concert of the inaugural BBC Proms Australia.Recent highlights also include recitals at Tonhalle Zürich, Wigmore Hall and Musashino Cultural Foundation in Japan, as well as her participation at the music festivals of West Cork, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Krzyzowa Music.

Chamber music is immensely important to Laura. She has collaborated with Tom Poster, Huw Watkins, Petr Limonov, Katya Apekisheva, Matthew MacDonald and Krzysztof Chorzelski, and regularly participates in international chamber music courses and festivals. Laura plays a late 17th-century cello by Francesco Ruggieri of Cremona, on generous loan from a private collection.

—

© Chris Gloag

HUW WATKINS

A pianist and one of Britain's foremost composers, Huw Watkins was born in Wales in 1976. He studied piano with Peter Lawson at Chetham's School of Music and composition with Robin Holloway, Alexander Goehr and Julian Anderson at Cambridge and the Royal College of Music. In 2001 he was awarded the Constant and Kit Lambert Junior Fellowship at the Royal College of Music; he now teaches composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

© Benjamin Ealovega

His own compositions have been commissioned and performed by the Nash Ensemble, Belcea and Elias quartets, BBC Symphony Orchestra, LSO, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, amongst others.

As a pianist, Huw Watkins is in great demand with orchestras and festivals including the London Sinfonietta, Britten Sinfonia, the BBC orchestras and Aldeburgh, East Neuk and Cheltenham Festivals. He has performed globally at concert halls including at Wigmore Hall, the Barbican, the Library of Congress in Washington, the Lincoln Center, the Smithsonian Institute in NY, Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival in Detroit, Kristiansand Orchestra in Norway, Columbus (USA) with ProMusica Chamber Orchestra, Domaine Forget and Toronto Summer Music Festival and in Italy, France, Germany, Hungary and Portugal.

Strongly committed to the performance of new music, Huw has had a few piano concertos written for him by Philip Cashian, Helen Grime and Tansy Davies.

He won the Chamber Music of Lincoln Center's 2016 Elise L. Stoeger Prize in recognition of his significant contributions to the field of chamber music composition. He was composer in the house with the Orchestra of the Swan and Composer in Association with BBC NOW.

He performs regularly with his brother Paul Watkins, as well as Tamsin Waley-Cohen and has featured as both Composer in Residence and pianist at festivals including West Cork Chamber Music, Presteigne and Lars Vogt's 'Spannungen' Festival in Heimbach, Germany.

Huw Watkins is regularly featured on BBC Radio 3, and has recorded for labels such as Signum, Chandos, Nimbus, BIS and NMC.

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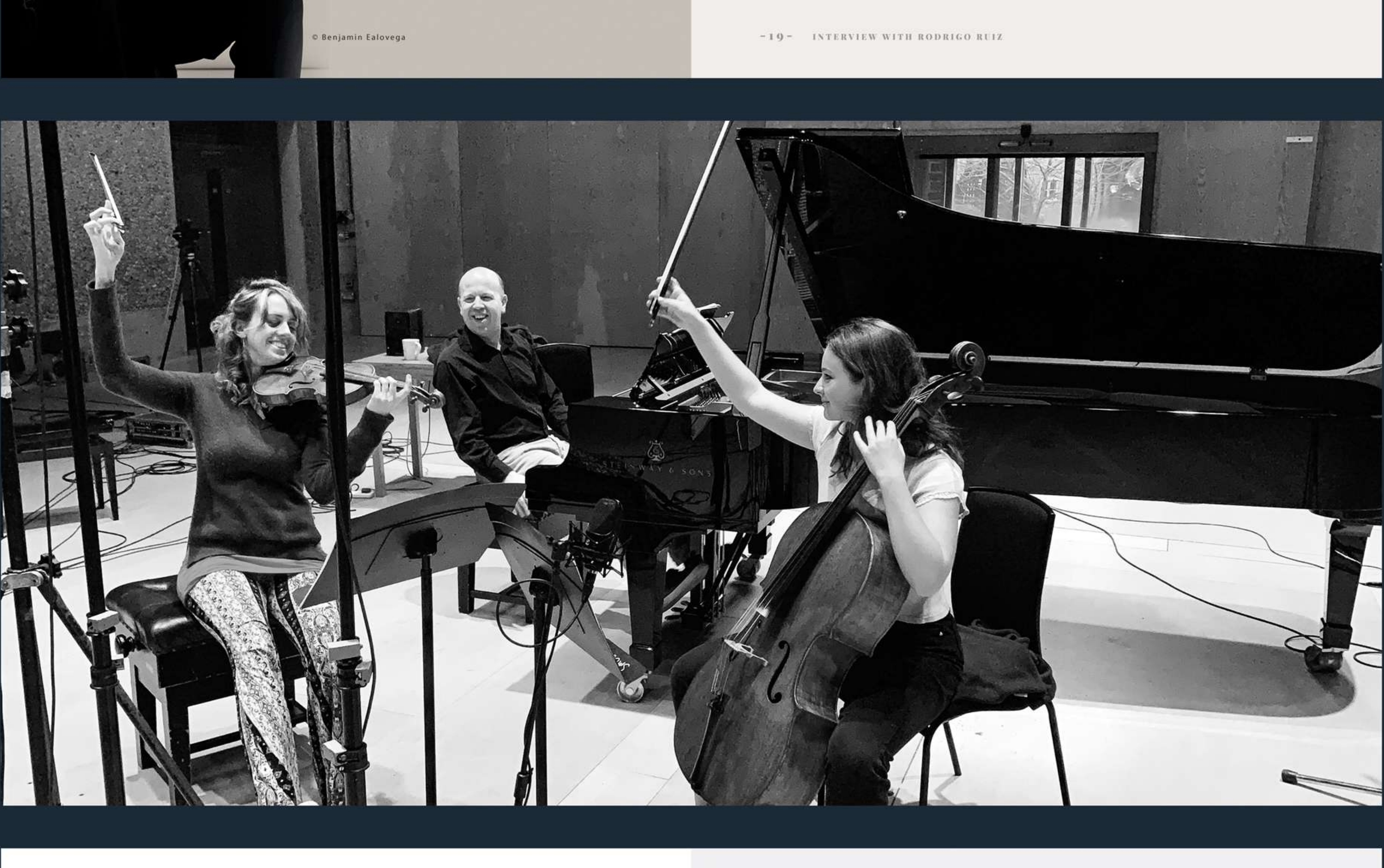

To **Francesco Telli**, without whose acute and honest observations these works would not have ripened as sweetly as they have.

To **my wife**, **parents** and **sister** for their boundless love and support.

All works published by
Rodrigo Ruiz

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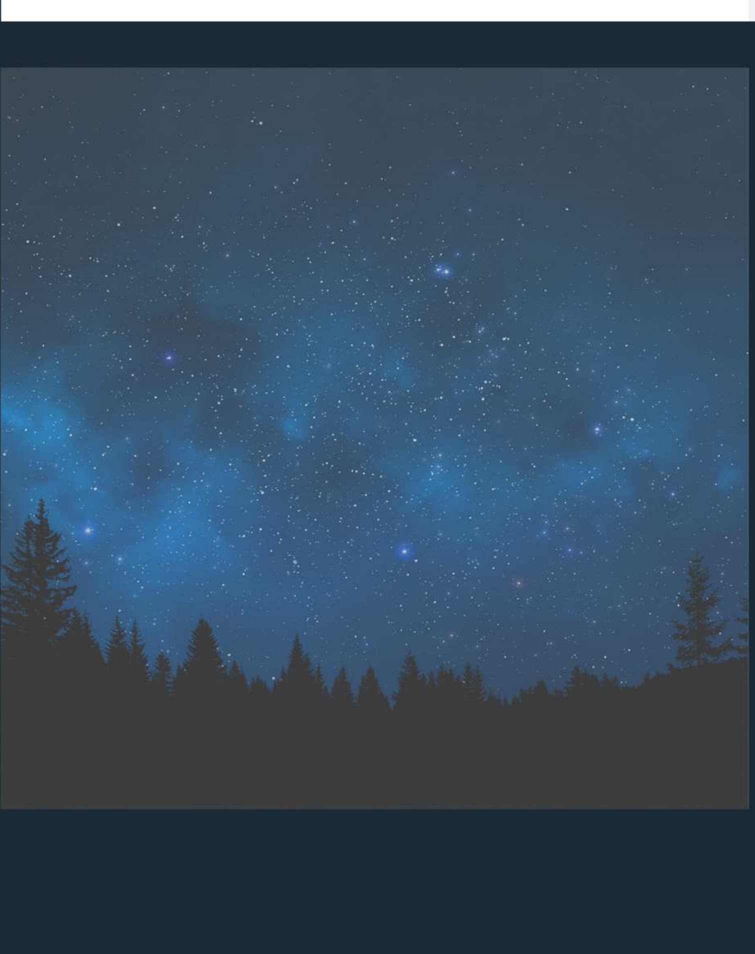
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