

Thorn and Flare (2009) was written for the Verdehr Trio, and draws to some extent on Albanian traditional instrumental music, specifically the semi-improvisational music called *Kaba*, or 'music with tears.' I traveled to Albania in 1995; my trip around the south of the country was one of the most amazing experiences of my life, full of encounters with wonderful people, beautiful landscapes and breathtaking music. This piece seeks an uncomfortable synthesis between Albanian-inspired musical elements and some of the harmonic vocabulary of Western late-Romantic period chromaticism. The music leads into and out of strong feelings, through nearby spaces that mitigate the dark mood, finding the edges between sorrow and tenderness, between rage and charged excitement.

I. *Thorn*: Pierced by longing; turning, stricken with that sad-thorn ache, reaching toward something that will not be. Cast out by desire, but caught in the pull of its waters, worrying the hurt as if sinking into currents of yearning were the only way to reach those dark pools of tender melancholy at the edge of the shallows.

II. *Flare*: A flash: burning with sudden bitterness that winds tight around itself, wearing down grooves, deeper and deeper in frustrated circles. An agitated thrill in fanning the flames of blind anger that ends up tearing at the air, finally snapping off in brittle fury."

—Evan Chambers

The world premiere of *Thorn and Flare* was October 24, 2010 in the Sunday Concert Series, 2009–2010 at the Music Room, The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Evan Chambers (born 1963, Alexandria, Louisiana) holds a Bachelor of Music in viola performance from Bowling Green State University where he was honored as an Accomplished Graduate in 2002. He then graduated with highest honors from the University of Michigan where he received a Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts in composition. His composition teachers include William Albright, Leslie Bassett, Marilyn Shrude, and Nicholas Thorne, with studies in electronic music with George Wilson and Burton Beerman.

Chambers was raised in Dayton, Ohio, by parents who were enthusiastic participants in the American folk music revival of the 1950s. His compositions bear the stamp of his early exposure to the edginess and immediacy of folk song and community music-making, readily crossing boundaries and reconciling disparate musical worlds. The result is a new music that honors traditional roots as diverse as Albanian polyphony, Sufi Qawwali music, sacred harp singing, Irish dance tunes, and Polish-American polkas without rendering them quaint or blanching their power. His music consistently honors the source experience even as it presents a synthesis; it captures the energy and vocabulary of folk performance and translates it into the language of contemporary classical idioms. His work has been described by the *Washington Post* as "luminous, wistful...undeniably poignant with an elegant sense of restrained longing."

Known for the intense vocal performances of his own works, Chambers describes his discovery of Irish traditional music in his twenties as a conversion experience; he has since become an avid traditional fiddler, appearing as a soloist in Carnegie Hall with the American Composers Orchestra in 2008. His widely-performed suite of American folk song settings, *Come Down Heavy*, draws on memories of his father "beating on the guitar and belting out 'John Henry' in one moment and crashing through the Tchaikovsky violin concerto in the next."

Chambers won first prize in the Cincinnati Symphony Composers' Competition and was awarded the Walter Beeler Composition Prize by Ithaca College. His work has been recognized by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the International Luigi Russolo Competition, Vienna

Modern Masters, and the American Composers Forum. His works have been performed by the Cincinnati, Kansas City, Spokane, Memphis, Binghamton, New Hampshire, and Albany Symphonies, as well as the American Composers Orchestra. A Carnegie Hall performance of his orchestral song cycle *The Old Burying Ground* was covered on the editorial page of the *New York Times*.

His work has been recognized by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the International Luigi Russolo Competition, the Vienna Modern Masters Orchestral Competition, NACUSA, and the American Composers Forum Sonic Circuits Festival. In 2009, he was invited to become a Fellow of the Lindisfarne Association, an interdisciplinary group of scientists, poets, artists, and religious leaders that has included Gregory Bateson, Robert Thurmann, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, Jane Hirshfield, James Lovelock, Stuart Brand, and Joan Halifax.

Chambers' works have been released on recordings by Equilibrium, the Foundation Russolo-Pratella, Cambria, Centaur, Clarinet Classics, and Albany Records, and have been recorded by the Greene String Quartet, the Albany Symphony, Quorum, the USMA Wind Ensemble, and the University of Michigan Symphony Band.

Chambers currently serves as Chair of Composition at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and as resident composer with the new-music ensemble Quorum.

Additional information, sound samples and music are available at www.evanchambers.net.