

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ARM



SOUNDS LIKE

1. Starting Positions (McNeill)
2. Jackrabbit's Palace, Series IA (McNeill)
3. Fluffernutter (Courtin)
4. Jackrabbit's Palace, Series IB (McNeill)
5. Jackrabbit's Palace, Series IC (McNeill)
6. pawns (Courtin)
7. Jackrabbit's Palace, Series ID (McNeill)
8. Double Memory (McNeill)

Evan Courtin, violin (1-5, 7-8) & voice (6)

Megan Kyle, oboe (1, 2, 5-8) & English horn (4)

Michael McNeill, piano (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8)

Katie Weissman, cello (1-8)

text of "pawns" from *Two Hunters* by Marina Blitshteyn

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recorded July 31 and August 1, 2019 at the University at Buffalo, located on Haudenosaunee land

engineered, edited, mixed, and mastered by Chris Jacobs

original album art by Meredith Gilna / design by Megan Kyle / liner notes by Kelly Bucheger

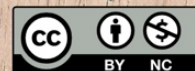


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The Evolution of the Arm is not just a fearless and quirky contemporary chamber quartet: EotA is a band.

Violinist Evan Courtin explains the distinction: "Calling us a classical contemporary ensemble doesn't fully capture what we do—what makes us a 'band' is that we only perform our own music: that creative decision makes this group unique to us."

Cellist Katie Weissman says that focusing on original music changes the character of the quartet for her: "We made the choice early on that we weren't going to play anyone else's music. That makes this group different for me: we trust each other to make good musical choices, and I feel free to do whatever I want and follow my instincts."

The Evolution of the Arm came together in 2017 for what might have been a one-off concert at Villa Maria College in Buffalo. Pianist Michael McNeill, although best known in Western New York as a compelling and forward-thinking jazz musician, had worked with the players on this recording in the celebrated new music collective Wooden Cities, and he'd already composed chamber works for Weissman and oboist Megan Kyle's duo Parvenue, along with a solo violin piece for Courtin.

For the concert, he thought he could bring those folks together and round out the music he'd already written for them with some new material—which would also give him a chance to write himself into a quartet with players he admired and wanted to work with.

During rehearsals it became clear the quartet had something special (it was on its way to becoming a band, after all!) and the members decided they wanted to continue to develop the group after the Villa Maria performance.

Buffalo, New York has a storied history as a hotbed for new and experimental music, of course, and EotA comes out of that scene.

Kyle elaborates on how the quartet reflects the city's influence: "Buffalo fosters and encourages collaborations across genres in a way that's different from some other places I've been, where musicians were more 'siloe'd' into this or that category. In this band we come from different backgrounds—though to some degree you might think of us as 'classical musicians' vs. Mike! But we're not just that: we're all improvisers, it's a big part of what we do, and we don't put a lot of stock in genre divisions."

Indeed, improvisation at a high level is a hallmark of EotA. While some chamber groups might include folks "willing" to improvise, EotA brings together four highly-experienced, fluent, and enthusiastic improvisers, each with a confident and mature improvisational language and approach. The ways these four players bring their unique improvisational voices together in this ensemble, and their seamless blending of improvised and composed music as captured on this record, is (to my ears) what's most compelling about Evolution of the Arm, and what makes this impressive ensemble a band. I hope to hear more from them.

- Kelly Bucheger, Boulder, Colorado

I came up with the basis of *Starting Positions* while I was stuck in northern Virginia traffic on the way to our first performance. The arrangement owes a great deal to the imaginations of Megan, Evan, and Katie.

The *Jackrabbit's Palace* series is a playground for the musical imaginations of this improvising ensemble. Each piece features a different soloist who improvises freely: piano, English horn, cello, and violin, respectively. Pieces A and C also include some composed interludes in which the soloist lays out. Meanwhile, the other members of the trio accompany and interact with the soloist using defined harmonies (and, in piece D, melodies) which they elaborate in various ways according to color indicators in the score. This creates an ever-shifting environment in which soloist and "accompanists" explore and interact.

Double Memory is a single-line melody surrounded by improvisation.

- Michael McNeill

In *pawns*, each line of text is followed by a corresponding miniature musical motif. As the poem constantly searches for the eponymous word, the music follows suit, so the musical phrases are congruent with each other only as much as the text allows. The rhythmic element of the piece takes the back seat to a more melodic framework about halfway through; the poem becomes seemingly more liturgical and pensive, and so does the music. As the text returns to familiar ground, the piece ends after a long pause to remind the listener of the word we've been searching for the entire time.

Fluffernutter is composed as a theme and variation. The theme is first presented split between the violin and cello with artificial harmonics. Each instrument is then assigned the theme, offset by half of a measure. The latter portion of the piece finds the theme at its most melodic point, with the cello taking the lead for the first half of the phrase, and the violin finishing it out. The piece is left open-ended, giving time and space to allow for deep contemplation of the titular sandwich.

- Evan Courtin

