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**NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG RELEASES
PAUL BOWLES' "A PICNIC CANTATA" ON NOVEMBER 18**



**Featured Artists Include Amanda Lynn Bottoms, Amy Owens,
Chelsea Shephard, Naomi Louisa O'Connell, Barry Centanni,
Michael Barrett, and Steven Blier**

**Out Friday, November 18, 2022 on NYFOS Records
Press-Only Download (Password - picnic):**

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www.nyfos.org

October 19, 2022 - New York, NY — **New York Festival of Song (NYFOS)** releases Paul Bowles' *A Picnic Cantata* on its in-house label NYFOS Records on Friday, November 18, 2022. Recorded at Merkin Hall at Kaufman Music Center on February 22 and 23, 2017, *A Picnic Cantata* features sopranos **Amy Owens** and **Chelsea Shephard**, mezzo-sopranos **Amanda Lynn Bottoms** and **Naomi Louisa O'Connell**, and percussionist **Barry Centanni**, together with NYFOS Artistic Director **Steven Blier** and co-founder **Michael Barrett** on the piano.

A Picnic Cantata is the result of a one-time collaboration between the piano-duo team of Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale, the composer Paul Bowles, and the poet James Schuyler. When the two pianists received a commission for a new vocal work from the arts patroness Alice Esty, they tapped Bowles to compose the music and Schuyler to write the libretto. Originally premiered at New York's Town Hall in 1953, *A Picnic Cantata* was well-received, but never published.

The seven-movement work balances sensuality with innocence and lightness with hints of foreboding. In its hyper-realistic world, a picnic basket seems to hold the entire contents of Zabar's and a car materializes on cue, as four friends—two sopranos and two altos—magically gather together. Bowles' music dips into the exotic sounds of Morocco and Ceylon, Poulenc-style post-impressionism, and pure American tunefulness to paint the journey, and Schuyler's libretto melds the directness of Gertrude Stein with the fantasy of Maurice Sendak, allowing simple things to become paradoxical and mysterious.

Having wanted to make a studio recording of the work for over three decades, Mr. Blier said, "Paul Bowles' *A Picnic Cantata* has been something of a NYFOS signature since the early 1990s. Alternatively spiky and lyrical, utterly unpredictable, and oddly graceful, Bowles' music won me over. Coming home to Paul Bowles' music and James Schuyler's words has been a pleasure and something of a revelation. In the 25 years since we first encountered *A Picnic Cantata*, we've learned more about both the composer and the poet. Its colors seem more vibrant than ever."

NYFOS' 2022-23 season also includes: *Kabarett* on **Wednesday, November 16, 2022 at 8:00pm** with soprano **Sari Gruber**, mezzo-soprano **Naomi Louisa O'Connell**, baritone **Justin Austin**, and **Steven Blier**; *Amor* on **Wednesday, February 15, 2023 at 8:00pm** with mezzo-sopranos **Lucia Bradford** and **Kate Lindsey**, bass-baritone **Federico De Michelis**, and others to be announced, together with pianist **Steven Blier**; and *Mediterranean* on **Tuesday, March 14, 2023 at 8:00pm** featuring **Caramoor's 2023 Schwab Vocal Rising Stars** with pianists **Steven Blier** and **Bénédicte Jourdois**.

All NYFOS programming is funded, in part, by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature.

About New York Festival of Song

Now in its 35th season, **New York Festival of Song (NYFOS)** is dedicated to creating intimate song concerts of great beauty and originality. Weaving music, poetry, history, and humor into evenings of compelling theater, NYFOS fosters community among artists and audiences. Each program entertains and educates in equal measure.

Founded by pianists Michael Barrett and Steven Blier in 1988, NYFOS continues to produce its series of thematic song programs, drawing together rarely-heard songs of all kinds, overriding traditional

distinctions between musical genres, exploring the character and language of other cultures, and the personal voices of song composers and lyricists.

Since its founding, NYFOS has particularly celebrated American song. Among the many highlights is the double bill of one-act comic operas, *Bastianello* and *Lucrezia*, by John Musto and William Bolcom, both with libretti by Mark Campbell, commissioned and premiered by NYFOS in 2008 and recorded on Bridge Records. In addition to *Bastianello* and *Lucrezia* and the 2008 Bridge Records release of *Spanish Love Songs* with Joseph Kaiser and the late Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, NYFOS has produced five recordings on the Koch label, including a Grammy Award-winning disc of Bernstein's *Arias and Barcarolles*, and the Grammy-nominated recording of Ned Rorem's *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (also a NYFOS commission) on New World Records. In 2014, *Canción Amorosa*, a CD of Spanish song—Basque, Catalan, Castilian, and Sephardic—was released on the GPR label, with soprano Corinne Winters accompanied by Steven Blier.

Their latest endeavor is NYFOS Records, which released its first album (*From Rags to Riches*, with Stephanie Blythe and William Burden) in January of 2022. They also issue a monthly single, with archival performances by artists such as Lorraine Hunt Lieberson and Bernarda Fink, and newly recorded songs by Joshua Blue and Sasha Cooke. NYFOS Records has reached rapidly growing audiences in over 100 countries, with well over 110,000 plays since its inception in November of 2021.

In November 2010, NYFOS debuted NYFOS Next, a mini-series for new songs, hosted by guest composers in intimate venues, including OPERA America's National Opera Center, National Sawdust, the DiMenna Center for Classical Music, the Ann Goodman Recital Hall at Kaufman Music Center, and now the Rubin Museum in Chelsea.

NYFOS is passionate about nurturing the artistry and careers of young singers, and has developed training residencies around the country, including with The Juilliard School's Ellen and James S. Marcus Institute for Vocal Arts (now in its 16th year); Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts (its 14th year in March 2022); San Francisco Opera Center (over 20 years as of February 2018); Glimmerglass Opera (2008–2010); and its newest project, NYFOS@North Fork in Orient, NY.

NYFOS's concert series, touring programs, radio broadcasts, recordings, and educational activities continue to spark new interest in the creative possibilities of the song program, and have inspired the creation of thematic vocal series around the world.

About Michael Barrett

Michael Barrett has been an active musician and impresario for the last four decades. He co-founded NYFOS with Steven Blier over 30 years ago and also founded the Moab Music Festival where he is currently Music Director and celebrating his 30th Anniversary season. Michael was mentored by Leonard Bernstein and was his assistant conductor for the final years of the great Maestro's career. An active conductor and pianist, Michael takes special interest in mentoring the latest generation of talented musicians. He also takes delight in working with contemporary composers and is thrilled to share Paul Bowles' *Picnic Cantata* with the public.

About Steven Blier

Steven Blier is the Artistic Director of the New York Festival of Song, which he co-founded in 1988 with fellow pianist Michael Barrett. Since the Festival's inception, he has programmed, performed, translated, and annotated more than 160 vocal recitals with art song repertoire spanning from Schubert to Szymanowski, and popular song from early vaudeville to Lennon-McCartney. Mr. Blier's recital partners have included Renée Fleming, Cecilia Bartoli, Samuel Ramey, Susan Graham, Jessye Norman, and Julia Bullock, in venues ranging from Carnegie Hall to La Scala. He is currently on the faculty of The Juilliard School; his discography includes the premiere recording of Leonard Bernstein's *Arias and Barcarolles*, which won a Grammy Award. *Opera News* proclaimed Blier "the coolest dude in town."

About Amanda Lynn Bottoms

Heralded for her “superb vocal and dramatic chops” by *Opera News*, with “stunning vocal beauty and absolute sincerity of expression” in *Chicago Classical Review*, mezzo-soprano **Amanda Lynn Bottoms** is an artist beloved by organizations including the Santa Fe Opera, LA Opera, Opera Philadelphia, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Philadelphia Orchestra, NYFOS, UCLA Symphony, Cecilia Chorus at Carnegie Hall, Opera Columbus, and NHK Symphony Orchestra of Tokyo. Bottoms has received recognition from prestigious international competitions including George London Foundation, Loren L. Zachary Society, Operalia, Gerda Lissner, Opera Index, and Metropolitan Opera National Council Regionals. Bottoms is an alumna of the Cafritz Young Artist Program at Washington National Opera and holds a Certificate of Professional Studies in Opera from the Curtis Institute of Music, a Master of Music degree from The Juilliard School where she won a coveted Kovner Fellowship, and a Bachelor of Music degree from SUNY Fredonia.

About Barry Centanni

A graduate of the Juilliard School, **Barry Centanni** is principal percussionist for the Orchestra of St. Luke's. He has also appeared with the bands Yes, the Moody Blues and Metallica, and with artists such as Tony Bennett, Sting, Elton John, and Frank Sinatra. He has also performed as an extra percussionist for the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the American Composers Orchestra, the New York Pops, the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic. An active teacher, he is chairman of the percussion department of Montclair State University. Barry is the owner of Centanni Percussion, a leading instrumental rental service.

About Naomi Louisa O'Connell

Naomi Louisa O'Connell's performance career encompasses a broad spectrum of theatrical and operatic repertoire, ranging from plays to operas, recitals and cabarets to sound sculptures and virtual reality performance art. Hailed by *The New York Times* as “a natural in the recital format” for her Carnegie Hall debut recital *Witches, Bitches & Women in Britches* at Weill Recital Hall, she performs regularly in concerts internationally. Works in development include a theatrical song cycle (for which O'Connell is also the librettist) with composer Emma O'Halloran. Upcoming engagements include performances with LA Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Prototype Festival, and Dublin Theatre Festival.

About Amy Owens

Award-winning soprano **Amy Owens** is known for her “high-flying vocals” and “scene-stealing” charisma on operatic and symphonic stages, as well as her innovative, multi-disciplinary pursuits in music and entrepreneurship (*Opera News*). She has performed with Santa Fe Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Dallas Opera, Houston Grand Opera, National Symphony, Utah Symphony, and other renowned orchestras across the U.S. Notable roles include Cunegonde in *Candide* and Soprano Soloist in *Carmina Burana*, and she has created the title roles in world premieres of *Sweet Potato Kicks the Sun* with Santa Fe Opera and *Listen, Wilhelmina!* with Wolf Trap Opera.

About Chelsea Shephard

Praised for her “rich and vibrant artistry,” soprano **Chelsea Shephard** performs full-time with the Metropolitan Opera Chorus. She first appeared with the company as *Eurydice* in composer Matthew Aucoin's workshop presentation. The Michigan native made her solo Carnegie Hall debut in Brahms' *Requiem* and returned for Smyth's *The Prison* (NY premiere). With NYFOS, her repertoire spans *Bel Canto/Can Belto* to *Songs of Protest* to Bernstein's *Songfest*. Operatic roles include Beth (*Little Women*), title roles (*La Calisto*, *Dido*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*), and Mozart's Pamina and Susanna—with companies such as Madison Opera, Opera Grand Rapids, Haymarket Opera, and Madison Bach Musicians. Education includes degrees from Rice University (M.M) and DePaul University (B.M.).

Picnic Cantata Tracklist

PAUL BOWLES – *A PICNIC CANTATA*, libretto by James Schuyler

- I. I feel funny today (4:41)
- II. In our search for order (4:45)
- III. In sun and shade on picnic tables (4:39)
- IV. Happy birthday, Taurus! (1:34)

V. I knee this other man was married (4:31)
VI. I never miss the garden section (2:40)
VII. How quick we came from where we were (5:41)

Amy Owens, *soprano*
Chelsea Shephard, *soprano*
Amanda Lynn Bottoms, *mezzo-soprano*
Naomi Louisa O'Connell, *mezzo-soprano*
Steven Blier, *piano*
Michael Barrett, *piano*
Barry Centanni, *percussion*

Producers: Michael Barrett, Steven Blier, Jonathan Estabrooks
Recording/Mixing/Mastering: Adam Abeshouse
Design: Gillian Riesen, Emitha LLC
NYFOS Records 2022
Recorded at Merkin Hall at Kaufman Music Center on February 22 and 23, 2017

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NYFOS Records is part of New York Festival of Song, a 501(c)3 nonprofit arts organization.
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