

# CONTINENT'S END

SONG CYCLE BY  
CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON-BAZZOLI

BASED ON NINE POEMS OF  
ROBINSON JEFFERS

BUFFY BAGGOTT  
MEZZO-SOPRANO

KEVIN KORTH  
PIANO

DE 3567



Christopher Anderson-Bazzoli

# **CONTINENT'S END**

Nine Poems of Robinson Jeffers

1. **Granite and Cypress** (3:51)
2. **Natural Music** (2:46)
3. **October Evening** (2:00)
4. **Continent's End** (6:23)
5. **Fire on the Hills** (2:28)
6. **Distant Rainfall** (3:26)
7. **Science** (3:26)
8. **Rock and Hawk** (3:43)
9. **Evening Ebb** (5:15)

Total Playing Time: 33:20

Buffy Baggott, mezzo-soprano

Kevin Korth, piano

### **Note from the composer:**

"Our inevitable place." That's how poet Robinson Jeffers characterized Carmel, California, when he and his wife Una arrived there by stagecoach in 1914. The rugged coastal headlands would become their home for the next half century and the subject of his life's work. Today the area is known to many as "Jeffers Country."

I grew up just a few miles north in the town of Pacific Grove. Before I ever read Jeffers I had surfed "the heavy-shouldered children of the wind" and hiked "the coast hills at Sovranes Creek...dark scant pastures drawn thin over rock shaped like flame." I was twenty years old when I picked up a small volume of *Selected Poems* and was immediately struck by its vivid imagery and deep sense of place. In Robinson Jeffers I discovered an artist who mythologized the landscape of my childhood.

*Continent's End: Nine Poems of Robinson Jeffers* represents my first musical settings of the poet. I chose from among Jeffers' lyric poems spanning the years

1924-1935, the early years of his mature voice. They focus on the experience of nature and convey Jeffers' philosophy of *inhumanism*: that humanity is self-obsessed and ought to turn its attention outward toward the "transhuman magnificence."

To capture a sense of immediacy in the music I began the composing process with a series of recorded vocal improvisations. After memorizing the poems I went into the studio and sang each one *a cappella*, moving between the driving tempo of deer fleeing a "Fire in the Hills" to the dirge of mourning women in "Distant Rainfall." I wanted to allow my visceral reaction to the poetry to guide its melodic contour and rhythmic life. I also paused for periods of silence that, I imagined, would later be filled by the piano.

After listening back to several (often surprisingly different) versions of each poem, I chose my favorites to transcribe and analyze, and begin devising the piano accompaniment—an endeavor that occupied me for the next several weeks. It was the first time I'd ever built

a composition around a purely improvised lead melody. The process provided a unique insight into my own musical instincts and resulted in songs with the organic character, elastic rhythm, and unpredictable harmonic language that felt true to the poetry. The last step was to transpose the music into the range of a female vocalist—a decision made in tribute to the many powerful women characters in Jeffers' narratives as well as the crucial presence of his wife Una.

*Continent's End* was commissioned by the Robinson Jeffers Association with additional support from the Center for Cultural Innovation. It premiered on May 26th, 2012, at the First United Methodist Church in Pacific Grove, CA, with mezzo-soprano Valentina Osinski and pianist Bruce Olstad performing. It was the keynote event of the Association's annual conference, entitled "*Intone One Language*": A Celebration of Robinson Jeffers in Words and Music, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the poet's death. For this world premiere recording I worked with the marvelous team of mezzo-soprano Buffy Baggott, pianist and vocal-coach Kevin Korth, lead engineer Leslie Ann Jones, and assistant engineer Dann Thomp-

son. In December of 2016 we spent three very rainy, but wonderful, days at the spacious recording stage at Skywalker Sound in Marin County, CA.

*Continent's End* is dedicated to my wife, Donna Eshelman, with whom I have spent many inspiring times in Jeffers Country.

Special Thanks: To the Robinson Jeffers Association, the Tor House Foundation, and the Center for Cultural Innovation for supporting the creation and recording of this work. To Lindsay Jeffers and Stanford University Press for permission to use the poems. To my mother, Gale Anderson, and father Dan Bazzoli, for their love and support. To the memory of Helen Robinson of Carmel, CA, a dear family friend and source of valuable encouragement.

— Christopher Anderson-Bazzoli

## POEMS OF ROBINSON JEFFERS

### GRANITE AND CYPRESS

White-maned, wide-throated, the heavy-shouldered children of  
the wind leap at the sea-cliff.

The invisible falcon

Brooded on water and bred them in wide waste places, in a  
bride-chamber wide to the stars' eyes

In the center of the ocean,

Where no prows pass nor island is lifted . . . the sea beyond  
Lobos is whitened with the falcon's

Passage, he is here now,

The sky is one cloud, his wing feathers hiss in the white grass,  
my sapling cypresses writhing

In the fury of his passage

Dare not dream of their centuries of future endurance of  
tempest. (I have granite and cypress,

Both long-lasting,

Planted in the earth; but the granite sea-boulders are prey to no  
hawk's wing, they have taken worse pounding,

Like me they remember

Old wars and are quiet; for we think that the future is one  
piece with the past, we wonder why tree-tops

And people are so shaken.)

## NATURAL MUSIC

The old voice of the ocean, the bird-chatter of little rivers,  
(Winter has given them gold for silver  
To stain their water and bladed green for brown to line their  
banks)  
From different throats intone one language.  
So I believe if we were strong enough to listen without  
Divisions of desire and terror  
To the storm of the sick nations, the rage of the hunger-smitten  
cities,  
Those voices also would be found  
Clean as a child's; or like some girl's breathing who dances  
alone  
By the ocean-shore, dreaming of lovers.

## OCTOBER EVENING

Male-throated under the shallow sea-fog  
Moaned a ship's horn quivering the shorelong granite.  
Coyotes toward the valley made answer,  
Their little wolf-pads in the dead grass by the stream  
Wet with the young season's first rain,  
Their jagged wail trespassing among the steep stars.  
What stars? Aldebaran under the dove-leash  
Pleiades. I thought, in an hour Orion will be risen,  
Be glad for summer is dead and the sky  
Turns over to darkness, good storms, few guests, glad rivers.

## CONTINENT'S END

At the equinox when the earth was veiled in a late rain,  
wreathed with wet poppies, waiting spring,  
The ocean swelled for a far storm and beat its boundary, the  
ground-swell shook the beds of granite.

I gazing at the boundaries of granite and spray, the established  
sea-marks, felt behind me  
Mountain and plain, the immense breadth of the continent,  
before me the mass and doubled stretch of water.

I said: You yoke the Aleutian seal-rocks with the lava and coral  
sowings that flower the south,  
Over your flood the life that sought the sunrise faces ours that  
has followed the evening star.

The long migrations meet across you and it is nothing to you,  
you have forgotten us, mother.  
You were much younger when we crawled out of the womb and  
lay in the sun's eye on the tideline.

It was long and long ago; we have grown proud since then and  
you have grown bitter; life retains  
Your mobile soft unquiet strength; and envies hardness, the  
insolent quietness of stone.

The tides are in our veins, we still mirror the stars, life is your  
child, but there is in me

Older and harder than life and more impartial, the eye that  
watched before there was an ocean.

That watched you fill your beds out of the condensation of thin  
vapor and watched you change them,  
That saw you soft and violent wear your boundaries down, eat  
rock, shift places with the continents.

Mother, though my song's measure is like your surf-beat's  
ancient rhythm I never learned it of you.  
Before there was any water there were tides of fire, both our  
tones flow from the older fountain.

#### FIRE ON THE HILLS

The deer were bounding like blown leaves  
Under the smoke in front of the roaring wave of the brush-fire;  
I thought of the smaller lives that were caught.  
Beauty is not always lovely; the fire was beautiful, the terror  
Of the deer was beautiful; and when I returned  
Down the back slopes after the fire had gone by, an eagle  
Was perched on the jag of a burnt pine,  
Insolent and gorged, cloaked in the folded storms of his  
shoulders.  
He had come from far off for the good hunting  
With fire for his beater to drive the game; the sky was merciless  
Blue, and the hills merciless black,  
The sombre-feathered great bird sleepily merciless between  
them.

I thought, painfully, but the whole mind,  
The destruction that brings an eagle from heaven is better than  
mercy.

#### DISTANT RAINFALL

Like mourning women veiled to the feet  
Tall slender rainstorms walk slowly against gray cloud along the  
far verge.  
The ocean is green where the river empties,  
Dull gray between the points of the headlands, purple where the  
women walk.  
What do they want? Whom are they mourning?  
What hero's dust in the urn between the two hands hidden in  
the veil?

Titaness after titaness proudly  
Bearing her tender magnificent sorrow at her heart, the lost  
battle's beauty.

#### SCIENCE

Man, introverted man, having crossed  
In passage and but a little with the nature of things this latter  
century  
Has begot giants; but being taken up  
Like a maniac with self-love and inward conflicts cannot manage  
his hybrids.  
Being used to deal with edgeless dreams,

Now he's bred knives on nature turns them also inward: they  
have thirsty points though.  
His mind forebodes his own destruction;  
Actaeon who saw the goddess naked among leaves and his  
hounds tore him.  
A little knowledge, a pebble from the shingle,  
A drop from the oceans: who would have dreamed this  
infinitely little too much?

#### ROCK AND HAWK

Here is a symbol in which  
Many high tragic thoughts  
Watch their own eyes.

This gray rock, standing tall  
On the headland, where the seawind  
Lets no tree grow,

Earthquake-proved, and signatored  
By ages of storms: on its peak  
A falcon has perched.

I think, here is your emblem  
To hang in the future sky;  
Not the cross, not the hive,

But this; bright power, dark peace;  
Fierce consciousness joined with final

Disinterestedness;  
Life with calm death; the falcon's  
Realist eyes and act  
Married to the massive

Mysticism of stone,  
Which failure cannot cast down  
Nor success make proud.

#### EVENING EBB

The ocean has not been so quiet for a long while; five  
    night-herons  
Fly shorelong voiceless in the hush of the air  
Over the calm of an ebb that almost mirrors their wings.  
The sun has gone down, and the water has gone down  
From the weed-clad rock, but the distant cloud-wall rises. The  
    ebb whispers.  
Great cloud-shadows float in the opal water.  
Through rifts in the screen of the world pale gold gleams, and  
    the evening  
Star suddenly glides like a flying torch.  
As if we had not been meant to see her; rehearsing behind  
The screen of the world for another audience.

*from The Collected Poems of Robinson Jeffers,  
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A multi-faceted composer and conductor based in Los Angeles, **Christopher Anderson-Bazzoli** (b. 1969) creates music with appeal across cultures and genres. His concert music navigates diverse aesthetics—from strict forms of motor-rhythmic “process” music to emotional and freely improvised art songs, embracing tonal and non-tonal

elements as well as electronics and amplification. Immediately after receiving degrees in Tuba Performance and Composition from UCLA, Anderson-Bazzoli served as editor and consultant for eminent composer-conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen on several projects with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, including Salonen’s now classic work *LA Varia-*

tions, and the *Filmharmonic* series with innovative stage director Peter Sellars. Anderson-Bazzoli won the 2010 Ironworks Percussion Duo Composition Competition for his dynamic work *Prayer of the Heliotrope*, as well as the American Composers Forum's Subito Award for his amplified string quartet *Gentrify*. Once a student of film scoring masters Henry Mancini and David Raksin, Anderson-Bazzoli was nominated for an Emmy Award at age twenty-one for his first professional score: *A Year to Remember* for CBS News. He has composed innovative and potent scores for the Venezuelan thriller *Elipsis*, the award-winning Swedish short *Without Snow*, and Panama's first-ever narrative feature film *The Wind and the Water*, which received its acclaimed premiere at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival. Anderson-Bazzoli's conducting engagements include the 2011 Carlsbad Music Festival for Sarah Kirkland Snider's "rapturous" (*NY Times*) song cycle *Penelope*, as well as leading a 40-piece choir for *A (Micro) History of World Economics*, produced by the groundbreaking theater troupe Los Angeles Poverty Department in 2013 and staged at LA's outdoor Pershing Square by noted French director Pascal Rambert. In 2018

Anderson-Bazzoli conducted the Louisiana Philharmonic in a performance at New Orleans' historic Saenger Theater with cult rock band Spinal Tap's former bassist Derek Smalls (a.k.a Harry Shearer), a project for which he also served as the primary arranger. Anderson-Bazzoli has also worked as a record producer, on the team that oversaw the recording in Los Angeles of Mark Abel's opera *Home Is a Harbor*, a 2016 Delos release that received wide praise.

California native **Buffy Baggott** has gained recognition throughout the United States as an accomplished and highly versatile lyric mezzo soprano. She studied vocal performance at UCLA and San Francisco State Universities, went on to complete two apprenticeships with the Santa Fe Opera and is an alumna of the prestigious Lyric Opera Center for American Artists in Chicago. She has sung roles with Lyric Opera of Chicago, Los Angeles Opera, San Francisco Opera, Canadian Opera Company and Chicago Symphony (among others). Recent performances include: *Giovanna (Rigoletto)*, *Maria (Two Women)* and *Hecuba/ Ghost of Cassandra (Les Troyens)* for San Francisco Opera; *Second Secretary (Nixon*



*in China*) for San Diego Opera Companies; Dulcinee (*Don Quichotte*) for Island City Opera; Mrs. Lovett (*Sweeney Todd*) for Hawaii Opera Theater; Countess Geschwitz (*Lulu*) for West Edge Opera; The Mother (*The Consul*) for Opera Santa Barbara; The Mother (*Hansel and Gretel*) and Meg Page (*Falstaff*) for Opera

San Jose. She can be heard on the Santa Fe Opera recording of *Emmeline*, and Cedille Records recordings of *The Good Soldier Schweik*, *The Billy Collin's Suite* and *In Eleanor's Words: Music of Stacy Garrop*. Ms. Baggott is a member of San Francisco Opera Chorus, AGMA, Sing for America and The East Bay Opera League.

As an in-demand recitalist and coach, pianist **Kevin Korth** has collaborated with such legendary and esteemed artists as Robert Mann, Axel Strauss, Joel Krosnick, Frederica von Stade, Suzanne Mentzer, Nadine Sierra, Lise Lindstrom, Kristen Clayton, and Brian Asawa. Last year brought the release of his debut album, *Out of the Shadows*, a recording of American art song with soprano Lisa Delan and cellist Matt Haimovitz on the Pentatone Classics label. Very warmly received, Gramophone praised Mr. Korth's work as "superb," and "full of color and character." Reflecting his demand as an interpreter of contemporary work, the album features premieres by Jack Perla, Gordon Getty, and David Garner, in addition to previously unrecorded works by Norman Dello Joio, Paul Nardoff, and John Kander. Since graduating from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's renowned Chamber Music program, he has held a position at the Conservatory as both collaborative pianist and vocal coach.



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From the recording session at Skywalker Sound  
Left to right: Leslie Ann Jones, Kevin Korth, Christopher Anderson-Bazzoli  
Seated: Buffy Baggott