



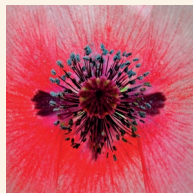
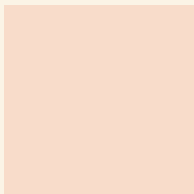
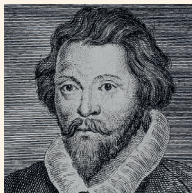
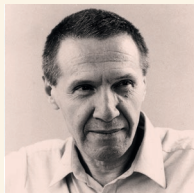
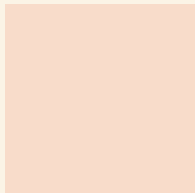
**KSENIA
KOUZMENKO**
PIANO

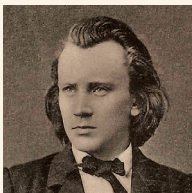
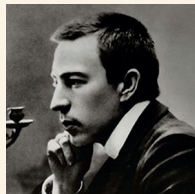
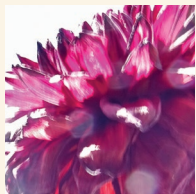
Flowers We Are...



**COBRA
RECORDS**

Flowers We Are...





KSENIA KOUZMENKO PIANO

KSENIA KOUZMENKO **PIANO** **Flowers We Are...**

György Kurtág (1926)

1. Flowers We Are, Frail Flowers... (1b) (Games, book I) (1973) 0:32
2. Flowers We Are, Frail Flowers... (1a) (I) (1973) 0:43
3. Flowers We Are... (VII) (2000) 1:18
4. ... Apple Blossom... (X) (1947) 1:00

William Byrd (1540 – 1623)

5. All in a Garden Green 4:27

György Kurtág

6. Flowers We Are... (4b) (I) (1973) 0:32
7. ... A Single Flower in Memory of Simone Verchaly (IX) (2005) 0:43

François Couperin (1668 – 1733)

8. The Budding Lilies (XIII) (1722) 2:39
9. The Reeds (XIII) (1722) 3:48

György Kurtág

10. Grassblades in Memory of Klára Martyn (V) (1982) 0:43
11. Flowers We Are... (in memoriam Árpád Illés) (V) (1980) 1:01

Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828) / arr. Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

12. Trockne Blumen (1823/1844) 3:38

Franz Schubert / arr. Alfred Cortot (1877 – 1962)

13. Heidenröslein, D.257 (1815/1953) 2:00

György Kurtág

14. Flower, the Flower... (V) (1979) 0:46
15. A Flower for Gabriella Garzó (V) (1981) 1:20

Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847)

16. Fantasy on “The Last Rose of Summer”, op. 15 (1827) 6:44

Fanny Hensel (1805 – 1847) / arr. Ksenia Kouzmenko

17. Why Are the Roses so Pale? (1837/2025) 2:11

György Kurtág

18. Flower and Thistle to S.W. (V) (1989) 0:24
19. Flowers We Are... (from the Sayings of Péter Bornemisza) (V) 0:44
20. A Gilly Flower for Márta (VII) (1997) 0:59

Clara Schumann (1819 – 1896) / arr. Ksenia Kouzmenko

21. The Silent Lotus Flower, op. 13/6 (1843/2025) 3:00

Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856)	
22. Blumenstück, op. 19 (1839)	6:42
György Kurtág	
23. A Little Flower From Me (...lovely greetings to Grete Spinnrad) (V) (1987)	0:23
24. A Flower (X) (1984. XII. 24)	0:40
Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897) / arr. Max Reger (1873 - 1916)	
25. To a Violet, op. 49/2 (1868/1906)	3:01
Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847 -1907)	
26. Song of the Roses, op. 39/4 (1896)	2:18
György Kurtág	
27. Thistle (III) (1979)	0:30
28. Bluebell (II) (1979)	0:41
Jean Sibelius (1865 - 1957)	
29. Bluebell, op. 85/5 (1916)	2:09
Selim Palmgren (1878 - 1951)	
30. Bluebells, op. 22/5 (1908)	2:07
György Kurtág	
31. A Sprig of Heather for Witold (in memoriam Witold Lutoslawski) (VII) (1994)	2:21
Mel Bonis (1858 - 1937)	
32. Narcissus, op. 90 (1910)	2:55
Cyril Scott (1879 - 1970)	
33. Lotus Land, op. 47/1 (1905)	4:02
György Kurtág	
34. Flowers We Are... (3) (I) (1973)	0:53
35. Like the Flowers of the Field... (in memoriam Ligeti Ilona) (V) (1982)	1:35
Sergei Rachmaninov (1873 - 1943)	
36. Daisies, op. 38/3 (1916/1924)	2:22
37. Lilacs, op. 21/5 (1902/1914)	2:33
György Kurtág	
38. ...and once more: Flowers We Are... (I) (1973)	0:54

Total playing time: 75: 36 min.



“...I look for a note and, perhaps, I will eventually find it. I may fail. Perhaps the piece is nothing more than an attempt to find it”. - György Kurtág

I want to dedicate this album to the magnificent composer **György Kurtág**, who will be a hundred years old in February 2026, and to his late wife Márta Kurtág.

My first introduction to the music of György Kurtág was in 1997 during the summer festival at the Tanglewood Institute in the USA, where I performed his *Grabstein für Stephan* as a member of the Festival Orchestra, conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw. It was a magical ritual, a surprising sound impression, and an extraordinary spacial experience. But what stayed with me above all was the concentrated intensity of this music, and the dedication with which Reinbert de Leeuw carried all these young musicians along in this new world of sound.

Some years later György Kurtág, together with his wife Márta, came to the conservatory in The Hague to give master classes. Besides teaching his own compositions, he also worked on classical repertoire. I had the privilege to play Beethoven's *Sonata in Ab major, op. 110* for him (one of his favourite Beethoven Sonatas). I remember an extraordinary, affectionate encounter with György and Márta Kurtág. Warmth, attention, honesty, endless searching for the essence of the music, for exactly the right sonority, for rich orchestral layers, but also for the loving and the intimate—that was his way of teaching.

In 2000 I played the solo part in his "...*quasi una fantasia...*" op.27 no.1, during the Kurtág Project at the Royal Conservatory, again conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw. Apart from the orchestral rehearsals I also got a private lesson from Mr and Mrs Kurtág. Thus I got the unique opportunity to get even closer to this music, and discover even more new layers in it. For example, the use of very basic musical elements like a descending scale, which carry a very charged significance. Or almost unplayable gestures/passages, like a flight of spirit. Or a song from afar on four sounds, which continues like an echo, and stays with you forever...

I still keep a score with his remarks in pencil as a precious possession.



*Márta Kurtág, György Kurtág and Ksenia Kouzmenko after the concert
at Vredenburg Music Centre in Utrecht, 2000*

On recommendation of György Kurtág himself I played “...*Quasi una fantasia*...” again in 2004, with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana during the Lugano festival in Switzerland, with Olivier Cuendet, the composer-conductor, who worked regularly with György Kurtág and also arranged a number of the latter’s pieces for different ensembles.

With much gratitude I look back on the encounters with György and Márta Kurtág. The musical world of György Kurtág became very dear to me. Every time I am deeply touched by the extreme intensity, the inner force as well as the vulnerability of this music.

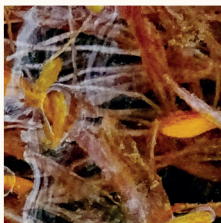
For almost two years I have been busy collecting material for this album. What a marvellous amount of music has been composed about flowers, and what beautiful work it is to become acquainted with it. Carefully selecting and bringing together these pieces, ever again changing the order, or adding new ones, I was not only concerned with different styles or periods, but also with composers who wrote beautiful pieces but have become forgotten over time.

In the end a rich bouquet of 38 flower pieces came out, in which all pieces communicate with each other—by means of an atmosphere, a tone, a common motif or interval (for example a “b” around the Couperin pieces), or the subject (a trinity of Bluebells, or pieces with a connection to Greek mythology). It’s fascinating to see how the program starts developing from within, and seems to be looking for connections on its own.

I love flowers and have been photographing them for years. It’s very intriguing to experience the entire life of a flower, from origin till decay. All aspects are miraculous: form, colour, texture, the way it feels, the way it smells... I love the abundance, but also to try and get as deep as possible into one single flower, to hear its inner voice.

It is like that with music.

Ksenia





György Kurtág



Márta Kurtág

Flowers We Are...

“Like the wild flowers, like shadows, like a bubble, like a dream, we are only that ...Flowers we are, frail flowers...” - Peter Bornemisza, XVIth century

“Flowers We Are...” is a very poetic album with “flower pieces” from the Renaissance to today, in which the flower symbolizes not only eternal beauty but also vulnerability, the fleeting of time, and the transience of life.

The album takes its name from a number of short pieces by the Hungarian composer **György Kurtág**, “*Virág az ember...*” (“Flowers We Are...”). It is a quotation from the sermons of Peter Bornemisza, a Hungarian poet-priest, and one of the creators of Hungarian as a literary language. Kurtág uses it for the first time in his “*The Sayings of Peter Bornemisza*”, op. 7, and it became a musical motto for him, appearing also at the very beginning of Book I of his “*Játékok*” (“Games”) for piano.

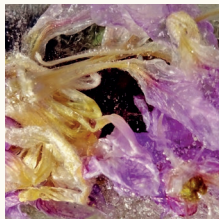
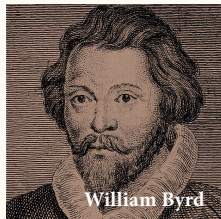
Compositions by Kurtág are often extremely short and aphoristic. From a few notes, a whole world arises. It isn't the reduction of means that he is after, but a compressed expression, a zooming in by which every note, every distance, every gesture receives its own unique significance. This extreme intensity creates a very special listening experience, which also puts other music in a bright new light. A natural tension arc is created, connecting the whole album from beginning to end.

Márta Kurtág: “*Gyuri's seven-note piano piece, “Flowers We Are”, comes to my mind. There you have two notes answered by three notes. The last two are a Coda. Whenever he teaches it, he points out that the music could be continued beyond the two ends of the keyboard. It also seems to seek contact with the infinite...*”

In this album you'll find eight pieces titled “Flowers We Are...”. Musical motifs from them can also be found in other pieces. There are flowers as a present: “*A Flower for Gabriella Garzó*”, “*Thistle and Flower to S. W.*”, “*A Gilly Flower for Márta*”, “*On Behalf of Me a Little Flower (...lovely greetings to Grete Spinnrad)*”. There are simply flowers (“*Bluebell*”, “*Thistle*”) and “*...Apple Blossom...*”, a “song”, written by György Kurtág at the age of 21, in the year he married Márta.

And there are pieces “in memoriam”, where flowers are used as a symbol of remembrance: “Grassblades in Memory of Klára Martyn”, “A Sprig of Heather for Witold” (in memoriam Witold Lutosławski), “Flowers We Are... (in memoriam Árpád Illés)”, “Like the Flowers of the Field... (in memoriam Ligeti Ilona)”. In “...A Single Flower in Memory of Simone Verchaly” Kurtág cites Shakespeare’s Hamlet:

Ophelia: *There’s rosemary,
that’s for remembrance...
and there is pansies,
that’s for thoughts.*



The 6 variations on “*All in a Garden Green*” by the English Renaissance composer **William Byrd** (1540 -1623) were originally written for the virginal, an English instrument from the harpsichord family. The work appears in “My Ladye Nevells Booke”, one of the most important collections of Renaissance keyboard music, composed between 1560 and 1590. The style of Byrd is rich and supple, with a sparkling, improvisatory freedom in the abundant ornamentation. As well, each of the variations has much more of its own character than it might seem to at first glance.

The two very delicate pieces of the French composer **François Couperin** (1668 - 1733), from the 13th series of his “*Pieces for Harpsichord*” are beautiful examples of French gallant aesthetics. In “*The Budding Lillies*” a subtly ornamented melody dances above the ever so light steps of the bass line, while “*The Reeds*” are continuously softly moving, in fluent, undulating phrases.

“*Trockne Blumen*” from the song cycle “*Die schöne Müllerin*” by **Franz Schubert** (1797 - 1828) is heard here in the arrangement by **Franz Liszt** (1811 - 1886). Liszt follows the words and melody of the song, but considerably enlarges the dramatic contrasts. The “*Lied*” becomes a concert piece, with an orchestral, richly varied sonority, from funerary sadness to ironic triumph.

The legendary French pianist and pedagogue **Alfred Cortot** (1877 -1962) arranged the famous song “*Heidenröslein*” by Franz Schubert into a subtle piano miniature in warm colours, with beautifully devised voicing and unexpected modulations. The piece breathes reflection and nostalgia.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809 -1847) was eighteen years old when he wrote the *Fantasy on “The Last Rose of Summer”*. At the time he studied history and philosophy at Berlin University. The song itself had already become a worldwide success. The poem by the Irish poet Thomas Moore had previously been set to a traditional Irish melody by John Stevenson, and was published in an 1813 collection called “*Irish Melodies*”. Mendelssohn alternates the song’s melody with a shimmering, impatient Presto agitato and a recitativo episode, and ends with a beautifully lyric coda which softly ruminates over the melody.

Fanny Hensel (1805 - 1847) was the older sister of Felix Mendelssohn, and was just as musically gifted as her brother. However she was not permitted to become a professional musician, as much she would have liked to. But composing remained her passion, and she organised famous, well-attended house concerts where her own works were performed alongside the compositions of others. The song *“Why Are the Roses so Pale?”* is a setting of a poem by Heinrich Heine about futile love, loss and sorrow, full of rhetoric questions which subtly resound in the music.

“The Silent Lotus Flower”, composed to a poem by *Emanuel Geibel*, is one of the most beautiful and well-known songs of **Clara Schumann** (1819 - 1896). The lotus flower blooms in a blue lake, and neither the enamoured moon, nor a singing swan are able to seduce her. Does she understand the song at all? The setting of Clara Schumann is of an intense harmonic magic. It starts with a question, and ends unanswered.

Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856) composed his *“Blumenstück”* in 1839 in Vienna, where he tried for some time to establish himself, far away from his fiancée Clara Wieck with whom he was forced to conduct a secret correspondence. This warm, loving piece evidently had a special meaning to him, as he incorporated the first part of it in his *“Bridal Book”* for Clara together with his song cycle *“Myrten”*, and gave it to her in 1840 as a wedding present.

The beautifully transparent, introverted love song *“To a Violet”* by **Johannes Brahms** (1833 - 1897), set to words by Ludwig Hölty, was arranged for piano by **Max Reger** (1873 - 1916). Brahms gave a manuscript of the song as a present to Clara Schumann in September 1872, probably for her birthday. Reger said about his arrangement that *“in the case of such masterpieces, any embellishment and any attempt to introduce a note of brilliance would be an unheard-of act of vandalism”*.

Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847 - 1907) wrote the quiet, poetic *“Song of the Roses”*. She was Norway’s first important female composer as well as a world-class pianist and pupil of Franz Liszt. She was good friends with Edward Grieg, premiering many of his works, and performed his famous piano concerto three times with him as a conductor. Grieg

wrote in his diary: *"If a mimosa could sing, it would resound with strains like those from Agathe Backer Grøndahl's most beautiful music"*. After her death she was almost completely forgotten, but fortunately her music is now being rediscovered.

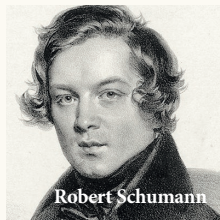
"Bluebell" by **Jean Sibelius (1865 - 1957)** consists of nothing more than silvery arpeggios, repeated bell-like motifs, and hesitating, probing phrases. A beautiful, intimate miniature from the great symphonic composer. Sibelius was not a professional pianist but had considerable proficiency on the instrument, and was known to enchant his listeners with his improvisations.



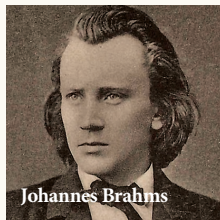
Fanny Hensel



Clara Schumann



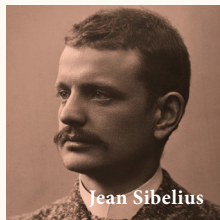
Robert Schumann



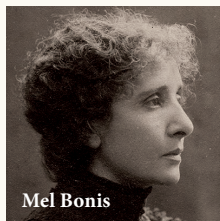
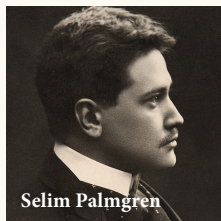
Johannes Brahms



Agathe Backer Grøndahl



Jean Sibelius



The undeservedly neglected Finnish composer **Selim Palmgren** (1878 - 1951) was a virtuoso pianist as well as a conductor. He wrote a lot for the piano, mostly subtle miniatures in a pianistic and harmonically complex, often impressionistic sounding idiom. He was called "The Finnish Chopin". "*Bluebells*" offers a feather-light, sharp but gloomy atmosphere of nature, with a motto by Heinrich Heine:

*"Am Kreuzweg wird begraben wer selber sich brachte um;
Dort wächst eine blaue Blume, die Armesünderblum."*

Mel Bonis (Mélanie Hélène Bonis) (1858 - 1937) took lessons from César Frank, and was a classmate of Claude Debussy at the Paris Conservatory. Her compositions have a unique sound in which force and vulnerability come together. This is clearly audible in her "*Narcissus*", an imaginative and passionate piece which sets the story of the youthful Narcissus, who falls in love with his own reflection in the water, to music.

The mysterious, hypnotizing "*Lotus Land*" by the English composer, pianist, writer, painter and occultist-mystic **Cyril Scott** (1879 -1970) brings us another story from Greek mythology: Homer's Odyssey. In book IX Odysseus describes the voyage to the land of the peaceful Lotofages, who ate the fruit of the lotus tree as a sedative and spent their lives in blissful slumber.

"...those who ate of it left off caring about home, and did not even want to go back and say what had happened to them, but were for staying and munching lotus with the Lotus-eaters without thinking further of their return..." (translation: Samuel Butler, 1900).

Two transcriptions of his own songs by **Sergei Rachmaninov** (1873 - 1943): the light, delicate "*Daisies*" and the nostalgic "*Lilacs*". In both pieces the marvellous pianist-composer Rachmaninov can be heard, who handles the songs in total freedom and creates magic with colours and moods. The melody can still be followed right through a ramifying network of voices.

"...and once more: Flowers We Are..." by György Kurtág forms the impressive, thoughtful conclusion of the album.



KSENIA KOUZMENKO

Ksenia Kouzmenko is internationally renowned for her sensitive and technically accomplished piano playing, and is a much sought after partner in chamber music.

Born in Minsk, Belarus, to a family of pianists, she studied with Vladimir Zaretsky and Grigory Shershevsky at the National Music College in Minsk, the latter being her father's former teacher. At the age of twelve she made her solo debut with orchestra and over the next few years she performed piano concertos of Beethoven and Rachmaninov. She graduated cum laude, with a Gold Medal, and continued her studies at the National Music Academy of Belarus with Igor Olovnikov (Master degree cum laude) and at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague with Naum Grubert.

Ksenia Kouzmenko has taken part in masterclasses with outstanding musicians such as Abbey Simon, György Sándor, Earl Wild, György Kurtág, Ivan Moravec, Walter Blankenheim (courses in Bach-interpretation), and followed an intensive chamber music program at the Tanglewood Music Center (USA).

She has performed with the National Symphony Orchestra of Belarus, the Brabants Orkest, the Collegium Instrumentale Brugense, the Nederlands Blazersensemble and The Hague String Trio. She was a soloist in the Kurtág-project of the Royal Conservatory conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw, and on recommendation of György Kurtág himself played his "...quasi una fantasia..." with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana conducted by Olivier Cuendet at the Lugano Festival. She has also recorded concerts for the National Broadcast Corporation of Belarus, Radiotelevisione Svizzera Italiana, Dutch television, and Dutch and Belgian national radio broadcasters.

Ksenia Kouzmenko has performed in Germany (Beethoven Festival in Bonn), England, Greece, Switzerland, Belgium (Festival van Vlaanderen), Italy, Slovenia (Tartini Festival), Spain (Festival “Semana de Musica Caja Astur”), Russia (Hermitage, St. Petersburg), and across the Netherlands.

Since 1999 she has been teaching at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague.

Ksenia Kouzmenko plays chamber music in almost every combination possible, and has built up an enormously broad repertoire ranging from Byrd to Kurtág. She is constantly searching for new, unknown compositions and is fond of creating unusual and inspiring programs. This results in very personal CD-projects and a number of world premières. She loves playing on historic 19th century grand pianos, with their exciting sound possibilities.

Discography

2013 *Poème* Franck/ Ysaÿe. With Lisa Jacobs (violin) - Challenge Records (CC72624)

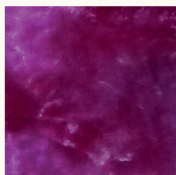
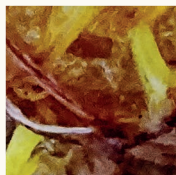
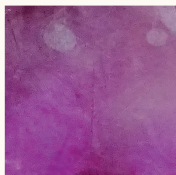
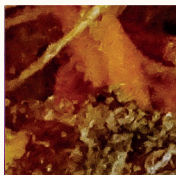
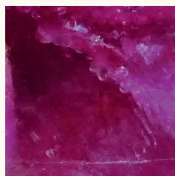
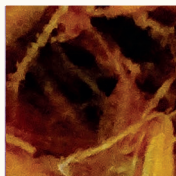
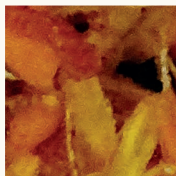
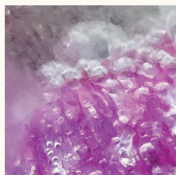
2018 *Whispering Leaves* Janáček/ Páleníček*/ Martinů. With Lucie Štěpánová (cello) - Cobra Records (COBRA 0069) *world première on CD

2018 *Ranges of Érdar* Heller/ Chopin/ Schumann/ Tchaikovsky/ Debussy/ de Falla/ Rachmaninov/ Scriabin/ Cervantes. *This recording was made in Middelburg on an Érdar Concert Grand (London, 1863)* - Zefir Records (ZEF 9656)

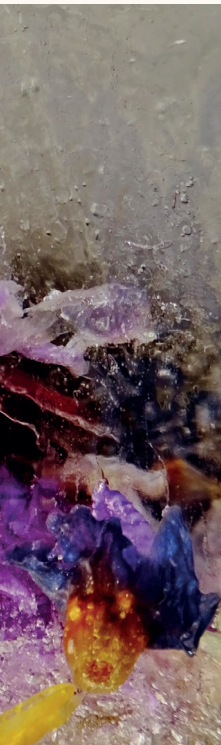
2019 *Fenêtre sur le jardin: Czech music for piano solo* Suk/ Janáček/ Martinů/ Kvapil*/ Kabeláč * - Cobra Records (COBRA 0070) *world première on CD

2020 *Vánoce: Christmas in Czech piano music* Suk/ Kvapil*/ Martinů/ Novák/ Křička*/ Janáček. - Cobra Records (COBRA 0079) *world première on CD

2023 *La présence lointaine* Mompou/ de Séverac/ Albéniz/ Debussy/ Ginastera/ Guastavino/ Cervantes/ Lecuona. *On an Érdar Concert Grand (London, 1863)* - Zefir Records (ZEF 9695)







György Kurtág

Recording: Mediatrack

Producer/recording engineer: Tom Peeters

Piano technician/tuner: Matthijs Jongepier

Recording location: Westvest90, Schiedam, The Netherlands

Recording dates: 20, 21, 22 October 2025

Microphones: Brüel & Kjær 4003, Neumann modified by Rens Heijnis

Microphone cables, interlinks: Acoustic Revive

Text: Ksenia Kouzmenko

Translation: Servaas Jansen, Katya Woloshyn

Flower photography: Ksenia Kouzmenko

Portrait Ksenia: Rob van Dam

Other photography: Creative Commons, private collection

Artwork design: Egbert Luijs (studioEGT)

Special thanks to Servaas Jansen

www.kseniakouzmenko.jouwweb.nl
www.cobrarecords.com



COBRA 0100