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SHIFTING GROUND

DEBUT ALBUM FROM VIOLINIST ALEXI KENNEY

WORLD PREMIERES BY MATTHEW BURTNER, SALINA FISHER AND ANGÉLICA NEGRÓN JUXTAPOSED WITH J.S. BACH'S CHACONNE, JONI MITCHELL AND ARIANA GRANDE

Release Date **7 June 2024** on **BRIGHT SHINY THINGS** (BSTC-0205)

“Through my lifetime of loving the Chaconne came the idea that inspired *Shifting Ground*: Bach is connected to everything. Beyond his music's most important capacity to speak straight to the soul, Bach's influence ripples through time and transcends genre. The structures, harmonies, and counterpoint he mastered are present in just about every genre of music we listen to today, and certainly have lived in the consciousness of almost all classical composers and performers who came after him.”

Alexi Kenney

On 7 June US label, Bright Shiny Things, releases *Shifting Ground*, the debut album from violinist Alexi Kenney. The title is a reference to the heart of all Baroque music—the ground bass—upon which variations are built, and whose omnipresence in music symbolises the enduring legacy of J.S. Bach. The album juxtaposes seminal works for solo violin by the Baroque master with premiere recordings of works by Matthew Burtner, Salina Fisher and Angélica Negrón; the violinist's own arrangements of Schumann, Joni Mitchell and Ariana Grande; and pieces by Eve Beglarian and Nicola Matteis. Negrón's *The Violinist* and Fisher's *Hikari* were both commissioned with funding from the Borletti-Buitoni Trust, which also provided support for this album as part of Kenney's 2020 BBT Award.

The seed out of which *Shifting Ground* grew was Kenney's love for the *Chaconne* from Bach's Violin Partita No. 2, a work that was also the favorite of his childhood violin teacher Jenny Rudin, to whom he dedicates the album. Interspersed throughout the album are other seminal Bach movements: the *Allemande* from that same Second Violin Partita, the two *Borea* movements from the First Violin Partita, and the opening slow movements from Violin Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2.

Shifting Ground's narrative traverses surreal dreamscapes, fiery virtuosity and spiritual beauty, culminating in Bach's grand elegiac masterpiece, the *Chaconne*.

In the process of composing *The Violinist*, one of the album's three world premieres, **Angélica Negrón** engaged New York-based comedian Ana Fabrega to write a short story, which she then recorded for Negrón to incorporate into the electronics for the piece. The story involves a nightmare scenario in which Fabrega is pushed onstage to play the Brahms Violin Concerto with the New York Philharmonic despite having no idea how to play the violin. Kenney played the US premiere of this work in February 2023, while the London premiere was in June 2023 at BBT's 20th anniversary celebrations at Wigmore Hall, along with the world premiere of **Salina Fisher's Hikari** featuring an open string-crossing motif in homage to Bach's Chaconne. The composer elaborates: "This piece entitled *Hikari*, meaning light, brightness, or radiance, leans into the violin's natural resonance and brilliance. Its musical language integrates the instrument's expressive warmth and lyricism with more 'transparent' timbres, in a constant search for light."

The album's third premiere recording, **Matthew Burtner's Elegy (from Muir Glacier, 1889-2009)**, is a meditative piece that Burtner says "sonifies Muir Glacier's transformation from a tidewater to a terrestrial glacier, using measurements of the ice retreat over 120 years to modulate glacier recordings." The work was commissioned by the Anchorage Museum and presented along with the painting *Muir Glacier, 1889* by Thomas Hill, from the site of which the glacier has now completely disappeared.

Shifting Ground also includes an eclectic assortment of works from multiple centuries. Baroque violinist **Nicola Matteis**, characterised by Kenney as "the spiritual and instinctual contemporary of J.S. Bach," is represented by *Passaggio roto* from his *Ayres for the Violin*; Kenney also includes the *Alia Fantasia* by Matteis's son. Jumping to the 21st century, Kenney records another work with electronics: **Eve Beglarian's Well-Spent**, written in response to a line in one of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks after a trip she took down the Mississippi River by kayak and bicycle. Kenney's own arrangements for violin of **Schumann's song Widmung**, **Ariana Grande's thank u, next** and **Joni Mitchell's Blue** round out the album.

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Notes to Editors:

SHIFTING GROUND – Alexi Kenney violin

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1. **Violin Sonata No 1 in G minor, BWV 1001: I. Adagio** Johann Sebastian Bach
2. **Widmung Op 25 No 1** Robert Schumann, arr. Alexi Kenney
3. **The Violinist** Angélica Negrón, featuring Ana Fabrega
4. **Ayres for the Violin: Passaggio roto** Nicola Matteis
5. **thank u, next** Ariana Grande, arr. Alexi Kenney
6. **Violin Partita No 2 in D minor, BWV 1004: I. Allemande** J S Bach
7. **Blue** Joni Mitchell, arr. Alexi Kenney
8. **Violin Partita No 1 in B minor, BWV 1002: VII. Tempo di Borea** J S Bach
9. **Violin Partita No 1 in B minor, BWV 1002: VIII. Tempo di Borea (Double)** J S Bach
10. **Well-Spent** Eve Beglarian
11. **Violin Sonata No 2 in A minor, BWV 1003: I. Grave** J S Bach
12. **Alia Fantasia** Nicola Matteis Jr.
13. **Hikari** Salina Fisher
14. **Elegy (from Muir Glacier, 1889-2009)** Matthew Burtner
15. **Violin Partita No 2 in D minor, BWV 1004: V. Chaconne** J S Bach

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Coinciding with the album release on 7 June, Kenney makes his debut at California's **Ojai Music Festival**

<https://www.ojaifestival.org>.

His first two programmes, produced in collaboration with Baryshnikov Arts, New York, feature video projections by visual artist Xuan along with music from *Shifting Ground* and recent works by Kaija Saariaho and Paul Wiancko (June 7 & 8). The next day he contributes Biber's Passacaglia for solo violin to a collaborative programme, before presenting György Kurtág's *Kafka Fragments* with soprano **Lucy Fitz Gibbon** (June 9), a recently announced BBT Fellowship winner in March 2024.

ALEXI KENNEY violin <https://www.alexikenney.com>

Violinist **Alexi Kenney** is forging a career that defies categorization, following his interests, intuition, and heart. He is equally at home creating experimental programs and commissioning new works, guesting as soloist with major orchestras around the world, and collaborating with some of the most celebrated musicians of our time.

BORN Palo Alto, California in 1994

STUDIED with Donald Weilerstein and Miriam Fried at New England Conservatory.

AWARDS include an Avery Fisher Career Grant and a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award in 2020 and he was also a winner of the Concert Artists Guild Competition.

ORCHESTRAS with whom he has appeared as soloist include Cleveland Orchestra, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Gulbenkian, Detroit, Dallas, and Milwaukee symphony orchestras, l'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

RECITALS as soloist include those at Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, 92nd Street Y, Mecklenberg-Vorpommern Festival, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

CHAMBER MUSIC continues to be a major focus of Alexi's life, performing at festivals including ChamberFest Cleveland, Kronberg, Music@Menlo, La Jolla, Prussia Cove, Seattle, and Spoleto, and touring with Musicians from Marlboro and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He is a founding member of the new inverted quartet Owls—hailed as a “dream group” by The New York Times—alongside violist Ayane Kozasa, cellist Gabriel Cabezas, and cellist/composer Paul Wiancko.

INSTRUMENT He plays a violin made by Stefan-Peter Greiner in 2009

OTHER INTERESTS outside of music include hojicha, modernist design and architecture, baking for friends, and walking for miles on end in whichever city he finds himself, listening to podcasts and Bach on repeat.

LINKS

Ariana Grande, *thank u, next*, solo violin cover - Alexi Kenney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEhjyPkZTVc>

Salina Fisher composer

<https://www.salinafisher.com>

Angélica Negrón composer

<https://www.angelicanegron.com>

Matthew Burtner composer

<https://www.matthewburtner.com>