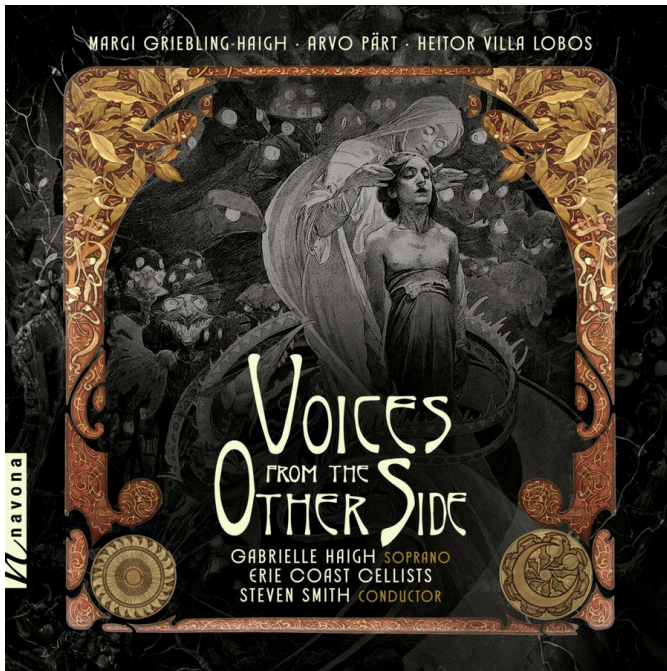


“Voices from the Other Side:” a conversation with Margi Griebeling-Haigh

By Mike Telin



When composer Margi Griebeling-Haigh was asked to write a companion piece for Heitor Villa-Lobos’ *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5*, for cello octet and soprano, little did she know that her 1999 work, *Voices From the Other Side*, a setting of three poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay, would resurface years later as inspiration for a recording project.

The album, “Voices From the Other Side,” was released in September, 2024 on [Navona records](#).

On Tuesday, February 25 at 7:00 pm at Federated Church in Chagrin Falls, the album will be presented live when

conductor Steven Smith leads soprano Gabrielle Haigh and the Erie Coast Cellists in Arvo Pärt’s *Fratres* and *L’abbé Agathon*, Heitor Villa-Lobos’ *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5*, and Margi Griebeling-Haigh’s *Cantilena* and *Voices from the Other Side*. Tickets are available [online](#).

During a recent telephone conversation Griebeling-Haigh said that when she composed “Voices,” she had no idea that her daughter would go on to become a singer. “She was a little girl when I wrote that piece. She inherited my love for the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay.”

Fast forward, when mother and daughter were tossing around ideas about what kind of project would be fun, they set their sights on making a recording with “Voices” and the Villa-Lobos serving as a natural starting point — but has anything else been written for cello octet and soprano?



“It turned out that there’s not a lot out there,” Griebing-Haigh said. “But Gabby did find Arvo Pärt’s *L’abbé Agathon for soprano and eight cellos*. The idea that it’s inspired by Maladrerie Saint-Lazare, one the oldest leper hospitals in Europe, appealed to her.

While discussing possible repertoire for the album, they realized that the cello octet was emerging as a common thread. “I wrote a single-movement work for eight cellos back in 1998, so that’s where *Cantilena* came in. And Arvo Pärt’s *Fratres* can be played by any combination of instruments.”

With the repertoire set, the next step was to find eight cellists. “I was fortunate to enlist such a great group of players who were excited to be part of the project.” The Erie Coast Cellists, an ensemble formed especially for this recording, include Ralph Curry, David Ellis, Khari Joyner, Julie Myers King, Robert Nicholson, Gabriel Ramos, Jeff Singler, and Richard Weiss.

With limited time to prepare, Griebing-Haigh said she was happy that Steven Smith, music director of the Cleveland Chamber Symphony since 2004, agreed to conduct. “Steve and I were at Eastman at the same time. We worked together twice, and I loved collaborating with him. He’s very clear and concise.”

Griebing-Haigh said that Tuesday’s concert is extra special because *Voices from the Other Side* was recorded at Federated Church in August, 2023. “Joshua Konow, the music director, and everyone at the church could not have been more accommodating — they literally gave us the run of the place for a week. I also need to say thank you to Ida Mercer and the Cleveland Cello Society for their support of the project.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com February 20, 2025.

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