

HENRY DEHLINGER

COMPOSER & CREATIVE THINKER

LONG BIO

1033 Words

American composer Henry Dehlinger stands out in the world of contemporary classical music. Hailed by *Gramophone* for his “vibrantly colorful palette” and “exquisite piano-playing,” he has produced an impressive catalog of music for choruses, chamber ensembles, orchestras, and solo vocalists. Fourteen of his compositions—three choral works, one chamber work, and ten art songs—made their world premieres this 2019-20 season alone.

Henry’s musical vocabulary exemplifies a modern but tonal American aesthetic. Merging classical and vernacular elements, he renders themes from a diverse palette of musical styles to amplify the texts he sets. These rich musical fragments are then woven into meaningful aural experiences that *Audiophile Audition* calls “stunningly superb” and “formidably essential listening!”

Noted New York musicologist James Melo observes, “Henry Dehlinger has been one of the most successful practitioners of polystylism, a distinctly 21st-century musical style that draws from multiple influences, genres, traditions, and techniques. He is also a major champion of vocal and choral music, and his polystylism allows him to chart a wide range of emotions, allusions, and images.”

Equally celebrated are Henry’s stylish arrangements of the *Duke Ellington Songbook*. With their melodic lines and edgy vocal and piano writing throughout, they have achieved widespread appeal. *Fanfare Magazine* calls them “superbly judged, from the lyricism through to the stride.”

Henry’s recent projects include *Kohelet*, an epic cantata in five movements for mixed chorus, soloists and orchestra. Co-commissioned by the Washington Master Chorale and the Santa Clara Chorale, it combines lush, modal melodies, energetic meters and colorful harmonic textures with Hebrew text from *Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Songs*. It also offers an ecumenical blend of Judaic antiphonal singing and Christian choral tradition.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, premiering at the National Philharmonic at Strathmore, is a sweeping rhapsody for voice and orchestra that Henry adapted from the famous poem by T.S. Eliot. Composed for Metropolitan Opera soprano Danielle Talamantes, it uses the melodic and rhythmic contours of Eliot’s stream of consciousness

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narrative to dictate mood and melodic character. Musicologist James Melo says, “In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Dehlinger approaches the voice as another instrument capable of the most varied and nuanced delivery.”

Melo goes on to add, “Dehlinger also honors the internal structure of Eliot’s poem by using references to different musical genres to articulate the various sections of the music, such as the complex rhythms of the dance-like scherzo that concludes the work, an example among many.”

Henry’s choral works are accessible to a broad range of ensembles and have been performed by professional, volunteer, and high school choruses from across the country. His choral songs adapted from poems by James Joyce—*Night Piece*, *Strings in the Earth and Air* and *Bahnhofstrasse*—are especially admired and continue to be performed.

His vocal chamber repertoire includes *Preludes of T.S. Eliot*, a setting of Eliot’s four-part poem that explores themes of modern urban life, and *Amore e ‘l cor gentil sono una cosa* (“Love and the gentle heart are one and the same”). When two of Henry’s dearest friends decided to marry, he wrote *Amore* as his wedding gift to them. The ceremony was in Florence, Italy, just before the world began to lock down in response to the coronavirus pandemic. What better text could he set than a love sonnet from *La vita nuova* by Dante Alighieri, the revered Florentine poet?

Like other musicians and performing artists, Henry’s work was impacted by the 2019-2020 coronavirus pandemic. The National Philharmonic at Strathmore, the Washington Master Chorale and the Santa Clara Chorale postponed the remainder of their 2019-20 seasons, including the premieres of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *Kohelet*, both of which will be rescheduled in upcoming seasons.

In 2011, Henry released his first album, *Evocations of Spain* (2011), a solo recital of piano masterworks by Isaac Albéniz and Enrique Granados. In 2013, he began a collaboration with soprano Danielle Talamantes that resulted in two more critically acclaimed albums. Henry’s second album, *Canciones españolas* (2014), is a collection of Spanish songs by Enrique Granados, Manuel de Falla and Joaquín Turina, which “stands out from the crowd,” as *Gramophone* affirmed in its applauding review.

The third, *Heaven and Earth: A Duke Ellington Songbook* (2016), features Henry’s own arrangements of Ellington’s jazz standards that he wrote for Danielle. *Audiophile Audition*

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called it, “a knock-your-socks-off performance that leaves you hankering for much, much more.” *Fanfare Magazine* concluded, “This is simply a superb album, stunningly recorded, that deserves every success.”

Henry’s eagerly awaited fourth album is scheduled to be released in fall 2020. *At That Hour* is the world premiere recording of Henry’s compositions for solo voice. It also marks the beginning of his association with AVIE Records, the UK-based independent classical music label. It was recorded over three days at Sono Luminus studios in rural Boyce, Virginia, with Danielle and bass-baritone Kerry Wilkerson and produced by Grammy-winning producer Erica Brenner. Danielle and Kerry both light up the stage not only as individual performers but as a husband-and-wife duo. That alone would make this album special. What makes it unique is that all seventeen tracks in this recital were composed especially for *their* voices.

Born and raised in San Francisco, Henry grew up studying piano and voice. His mentors were piano virtuoso Thomas LaRatta and choral conductor William "Doc" Ballard, artistic director of the San Francisco Boys Chorus, both of whom Henry credits for his early success as a musician. He earned a reputation as a prodigious talent, singing with the San Francisco Opera and performing with major orchestras under conductors such as Riccardo Chailly and Edo de Waart. He later graduated from Santa Clara University where he studied piano with Hans Boepple.

During his recital career, *ConcertoNet.com* lauded him as “an experienced and versatile soloist.” *MusicWeb International* praised his "delicious piano playing," and *Audiophile Audition*, his "adroit and sparkling" performances.

Henry is a voting member of The Recording Academy, organizer of the Grammy Awards, and ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers). He and his wife Lauren and their Shetland Sheepdogs, Spy and Summer, divide their time between their home in Northern Virginia, just outside Washington, DC, and California. The official Henry Dehlinger website is www.HenryDehlinger.com.

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