



ARTURO SANDOVAL'S

# WILDFLOWER

YOLANDA'S SONG



YOLANDA KONDONASSIS

HARP

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It is difficult to put into words what this piece meant to me at precisely the time I received it. It was the summer of 2021 and I was in the final stages of assembling my FIVE MINUTES for Earth project and preparing all the works to record in the early fall. The composition came to me as a generous gift to the FIVE MINUTES project from my treasured friend, Arturo Sandoval, under his working title *Yolanda's Harp*, and I couldn't wait to dig in. Like most of us at that point, I was suffering the effects of having been largely isolated for over a year and suppressing the fear that post-COVID life was still a long way off. Perhaps it was just my myopic view at the time, but it seemed as though so much music, art, film, and creative work had become dark, cynical, and at best, realistic to a fault. To say Arturo's piece was the light and breath I desperately needed would be an understatement. Playing it for even a short amount of time lifted my spirit, cleared my head, and made me feel hopeful. When Arturo and I discussed options for the final title, I expressed to him how poignant and pure the piece felt to me and that I thought it needed a title with a similar purity of spirit - with perhaps the suggestion of a throwback to simpler times. *Wildflower* (subtitled *Yolanda's Song*) seemed to fit. In today's complex world, there are so very few things that universally symbolize beauty and positivity, honor and respect, love and celebration, and the good in us all so broadly and cross-culturally as flowers do. This piece celebrates the idea that there are still common threads that bind us together, common truths upon which we can all agree, and a planet that sustains both our practical needs and our higher aspirations. Like flowers, we come in all colors of the rainbow and we must never forget that love, beauty, and light are still at the core of all we are, and all we should be.

*Wildflower* has also been a uniquely wonderful experience for me as a classically trained musician. When I first asked Arturo Sandoval if he would consider writing a piece for me and the FIVE MINUTES for Earth collection, I was - as I always am - excited to stretch my accustomed idiom into a new realm, and his piece was all I had hoped. As an iconic jazz artist and composer, Arturo took on the task of harp writing with what I might call a jazz-inspired, cinematic style. I studied Arturo's recordings and the great jazz pianists with the goal of understanding best practices of improvising where appropriate and the art of treating melodic lines like a solo jazz artist weaving those melodies and riffs around my own accompaniment. The process was fascinating and more rewarding that I ever could have imagined - and liberating in a way I have

never experienced. *Wildflower* gave me an entirely new palette and a hundred fresh ways to musically express those emotions for which there are no words, with each performance considerably different than the last. During the past few years, we have all experienced loss, isolation, and uncertainty that has challenged our view of many things we once took for granted. The tenderness, the poignancy, the longing, the triumph, the freedom, and the humanity of this piece is a gift.

We chose a Mother's Day weekend release for several reasons. The title, the music, and the feeling of this work capture the freshness of spring in a dozen ways, but more deeply than that, I had a strong reaction to this work from the very first time I dug into it. I remember saying to myself out loud, "Mom would have loved this piece so much." My mother was my first piano teacher from the age of 3 until I went away to high school at Interlochen Arts Academy at 14, so her musical approach is woven into my fiber. She was something of a piano-teaching guru in my hometown of Norman, Oklahoma, with as many as a hundred piano students in her private studio at any given time. While she focused her students primarily on the classical repertoire, her guilty pleasures were always standards from the American Songbook, Gershwin, Mancini, Bacharach, and the sentimental hits. Sometimes at the end of a long teaching day, she would sit down at the piano herself for a few moments and play something from her private collection just to clear her head. My mom passed away in 2012, but she was a ferocious spirit and her presence stays with me. Somewhere along the way in the process of internalizing this beautiful work, *Wildflower* became hers. Even the title embodies her spirit. The closeness I feel to my own mother in this thread of common experience is not only a bridge to her legacy in me, but an inspiration to continue cultivating that same meaningful connection with my own daughter. Motherhood is a spiritual undertaking, a leap of faith, and unlike anything else in this world. As important things often do, *Wildflower* came to me with an unexpected, secret portal; in it there was an opening to perspective, to peace, and to gratitude - gifts that keep me afloat as I bob around in that fluid space between being a daughter and being a mother in these ever-changing times.

-Yolanda Kondonassis

*Wildflower* is part of the FIVE MINUTES for Earth Collection. Learn more at [EarththatHeart.org](http://EarththatHeart.org).

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Photo: Jeremy Lock

**ARTURO SANDOVAL** is a protégé of the legendary jazz master Dizzy Gillespie and was born in Artemisa, a small town on the outskirts of Havana, Cuba, on November 6, 1949, just two years after Gillespie became the first musician to bring Latin influences into American Jazz. Sandoval began studying classical trumpet at the age of twelve, but it didn't take him long to catch the excitement of the jazz world. He has since evolved into one of the world's most acknowledged guardians of jazz trumpet and flugelhorn, as well as a renowned classical artist, pianist, and composer. Sandoval has been awarded 10 Grammy Awards and nominated 19 times; he has also received 6 Billboard Awards and an Emmy Award, the latter for his composing work on the entire underscore of the HBO movie based on his life, "For Love or Country" that starred Andy Garcia as Arturo. In addition to his iconic accomplishments as a jazz artist, Sandoval performs regularly with leading symphony orchestras around the world. His own *Concerto for Trumpet & Orchestra* can be heard on *Arturo Sandoval: The Classical Album*. Recently released is a new book chronicling Sandoval's relationship with Dizzy Gillespie, entitled *The Man Who Changed My Life*. In 2013, Arturo Sandoval was presented with the the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama. Visit [ArturoSandoval.com](http://ArturoSandoval.com)



Photo: Laura Watilo Blake

**YOLANDA KONDONASSIS** is celebrated as one of the world's leading harp soloists and has performed around the globe as a concerto soloist and recitalist. She released her first solo recording in 1993 to widespread critical acclaim and has since recorded over twenty albums, sold hundreds of thousands of discs and downloads worldwide, made over two dozen world premiere recordings, and received two GRAMMY nominations. She is hailed as "viscerally exciting" (*The Chicago Tribune*) and has been praised for her "keen sense of dramatic timing and a range of colour that's breathtaking" (*Gramophone*). Also a published author, speaker, professor of harp, and environmental activist, she weaves her many passions into a vibrant and multi-faceted career.

Since making her solo debut at age 18 with the New York Philharmonic, Kondonassis has appeared with countless major orchestras in the United States and abroad, in addition to engagements at venues such as Carnegie Hall, Taiwan's National Concert Hall, and at renowned festivals including Santa Fe, Marlboro, Spoleto, Mainly Mozart, and Tanglewood. She has been featured on CNN, PBS, Sirius XM Radio, and National Public Radio, and is a frequent guest on podcasts and live social media events.

Her most recent publications include *The Composer's Guide to Writing Well for the Modern Harp* (Carl Fischer) and the second edition of *My Earth, My Home: A Kid's Book About Why Protecting Our Planet Matters* (Sky Horse). Kondonassis is the founder and director of Earth at Heart®, a non-profit organization devoted to inspiring earth conservation awareness through the arts. Visit [YolandaHarp.com](http://YolandaHarp.com)