

## Works by John Cage, Lou Harrison, Henry Cowell, Harvey Sollberger, Lukas Foss

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Just over a half century ago Edgar Varèse presented *Ionisation*, for percussion alone, to an incredulous audience at Carnegie Hall. Since then the percussion ensemble, which began on what must surely have seemed the lunatic fringe of music, has emerged from the shadow of its previous accompanimental and decorative function within the orchestra to become a legitimate medium for musical expression. In addition to a number of excellent professional organizations, there are, according to the College Music Society's statistics, more than 275 percussion ensembles in this country's colleges. The repertoire is expanding as well: The Percussive Arts Society now lists more than 500 compositions for percussion ensemble and over 1,000 pieces for solo percussion or for percussion accompanied by instrumental ensemble.

The genesis of the independent percussion ensemble may be linked to the desire of twentieth-century composers to extend the world of timbral resources, as well as to an interest in the music and philosophy of non-Western cultures, whose sophisticated rhythms are often expressed by percussion instruments. As composers have sought new ways to organize music, rhythm has served as a structural foundation through which the hegemony of pitch-based systems might be destroyed. Concentration on the percussive aspects of music also reflects an interest in primitive cultures, which expressed primal energy through rhythm; rhythm may also express primitivism's opposite, an advanced mechanized society, the characteristics of which are at the pounding pulse of its machinery and the monotonous regularity of daily life.

The composers on this recording explore different aspects of time and rhythm. John Cage, Lou Harrison, and Henry Cowell view time linearly: pulse is established by a steady shower of eighth notes, against which subtle rhythmic quirks can be superimposed. Lukas Foss treats time dialectically and episodically, alternating and contrasting the dreamlike state of unrelated rhythmic interactions with the reality of linearity, represented by repeated rhythmic patterns: Harvey Sollberger prefers the expressive capabilities of the recitative in contrast to the motoric regularity of a steady pulse that carries us from moment to moment with its inherent logic in the work of Cage and Harrison.

*Double Music* (1941), for four percussionists, was composed jointly by John Cage and Lou Harrison, each writing two of the four parts. The work's rhythmic resources are narrow, consisting entirely of eighth notes grouped in twos and threes within a steady eighth-note pulse. The superimposition of two or three rhythmically active parts creates a kaleidoscope of minute shifts in accent, while the timbres of various instruments (water-buffalo bells, muted gongs, sleigh bells) lend the work the jangling, joyous air of a town celebration.

*Second Construction* (1940), for four percussionists, is one of three "Constructions" composed from 1939 to 1941. It was written at the beginning of a fertile period when many of Cage's compositions relied on the repetition of rhythmic patterns (*Six Melodies for Violin and Keyboard*, for example, is built on the repetition of the

pattern 31/2, 31/2, 4, 4, 3, 4). In these compositions the small durational structures mirror the larger formal structure, creating a unity on both the micro- and macrocosmic levels. *Second Construction* is scored for four players and fourteen instruments, including a piano that is minimally prepared. The instruments (snare drum, temple gongs, sleigh bells) that play active rhythms contrast with instruments that are nonrhythmic and sustaining (water gong and the "siren" sound of rubbed piano strings).

***Third Construction*** (1941), for four percussionists, calls for a large battery of percussion instruments, including twenty tin cans of various sizes, twelve tom-toms, claves, gongs, cymbals, ratchets, cowbells, maracas, cricket callers (made of split bamboo) conch shell, and a bass drum that is rubbed to produce a roaring sound. The one-movement work is continuous—one instrument generally sustains the work's motoric rhythmic impulse, although sections are marked by timbre differences. The instrumental resources provide three distinct timbre groups: metal (tin cans, cowbells, tambourine), wood and skin (claves, tom-toms, cricket callers), and sustained (the blown conch shell and the bass-drum roar). The work often features exotic duets, trios, and quartets of like instruments. Sometimes smooth transitions are effected by the entry of one instrument from another group, closely followed by its sister instruments; sometimes transition is eliminated in favor of a clear distinction between separate groups of instruments.

The work's predominant motor rhythm, extensive use of ostinatos, and exuberant dancelike quality are reminiscent of the drum music of non-European cultures. The tendency to add or subtract notes from an existing musical phrase is influenced by compositional techniques of Indian music. Continuous rather than progressive, the work reflects a non-Western philosophical view. Nevertheless, the piece proceeds to two climaxes, audible toward the conclusion, which are characterized by the presence of the two sustaining instruments—the bass-drum roar and the blown conch shell.

***Pulse*** (1939), for six percussionists, was composed for John Cage's newly formed percussion ensemble. Its texture is generally sparser and more delicate than that of Cage's *Third Construction*. Its pace (in rapid 7/8) and instrumentation (three Korean dragon's mouths, three woodblocks, three Chinese tom-toms, three drums, three rice bowls, three temple gongs, three cymbals, three gongs, three pipes, and three brake drums) give it a distinctly Oriental character.

The piece contains two simple principal motives. After one measure of introduction the motive that dominates the A section is presented by the Korean dragon's mouths (which sound like soft wood blocks) and repeated by tom-toms and wood blocks. The rhythmic character of the motive and its frequent repetition create a Baroque fugal quality—an assimilation of Eastern and Western musical elements that might have been the product of some great Oriental Bach. The B section is characterized by a steady eighth-note impulse accented on the first beat of every measure and bandied between the resonant, metallic-sounding rice bowls and the Japanese temple gongs. The simple A-B-A-B is delineated by the clearly audible presence of two distinct motives. Following a pause at the end of the second B section, a coda begins with long tones in gongs and cymbals, to which is added the B motive played in syncopation and at different speeds.

***The Two and The One*** (1972), for two percussionists and cellist, reflects the compositional thinking of an instrumental virtuoso by making rigorous demands on the performers. Except for a few teasing moments, Sollberger abandons periodicity (a steady beat)—prevalent in the other works on this recording—for a dramatic dialogue among the

players. The result is an intense, frenetic piece of music that contrasts various kinds of musical interaction, but in which fierce independence of musical lines predominates. Also unlike the other works performed here, which make use of only a few notes in simple combinations, *The Two and The One* uses all twelve pitches of the chromatic scale and is complex and serially controlled.

The title was suggested by a philosophy text of the same name by Micea Eliade. In the composition, the "two" of the title refers to the percussionists; one plays mostly on twelve metal instruments, the other on twelve nonmetal ones. The separation between the two parts is intensified by the pitch (or contour) language: Each percussion part plays only one hexachord, which has no pitches in common with the other. The cello (whose material is based on both hexachords throughout) brings the percussionists together; often by taking their refractory music under its powerfully dramatic sway.

*Percussion Quartet* (1983) was composed for Claire Heldrich and the New Music Consort. In the work the players climb over each other to play various instruments, and at another point make playing motions while remaining silent. The composition consists of five sections played without pause, which contrast an evocative sense of timelessness with dancing periodicity. The slowly unfolding "Introduction" culminates in the ethereal sound of the four players bowing two vibraphones. The composer's instructions, "no clocks, no cues," direct the players to proceed as they see fit, lending an aura of chance to the section.

Out of this atmosphere smoothly flows "Song", in which a simple five-note melody sung by the mallet-struck vibraphone is accompanied by bowed vibraphone and by the timpani, which eventually imitate, in fourths, the simple rising contours of the vibraphone tune. The song continues in a peaceful and touching manner until the surprise introduction of foreign pitches, which destroy the homogeneous harmony that has dominated the section and herald the coming of the next section.

"Recitative" is in sharp contrast to the first two sections. Abandoning the peace of steady sustained pitches and the cooperative feeling of lines shared among the players, the percussionists step out to display their talents in disorderly, impetuous outbursts of competitive virtuosity.

In "Monsters," each of the four timpani invades the territory of the others in disruptive gestures, creating (in the composer's words), "the effect of a battle, with sudden strokes in all directions."

"Dance" has a colorful polyphonic texture as all four performers separately play the melodies.

The Quartet has two optional endings; in performance the audience determines which is used by their applause. For this recording, the longer version with the final measures was used. —PERRY GOLDSTEIN

*Perry Goldstein has written extensively on modern music, as well as performance notes for Carnegie Hall and the Library of Congress. From 1975-1978, he produced programs on twentieth-century music for National Public Radio affiliate WILL. He has taught music at Baruch College and Kingsborough College (C.U.N.Y).*

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

### **John Cage**

*Amores*, for prepared piano and percussion. Blackearth Percussion Group. Opus One 22. Amadinda Percussion Group. Hungaroton HCD 12991.

*(First) Construction in Metal*. London Percussion Ensemble, Harold Farberman conducting Moss Music Group 105.

*Music of Changes*, Parts III and IV. David Tudor, piano. New World 214.

*Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano* (selection). Robert Miller, piano. New World 80203-2.

String Quartet. LaSalle Quartet. Deutsche Grammophon DG-2530735.

*Third Construction*. Continuum Percussion Quartet. New World 80381.

### **Lou Harrison**

*Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra*. Eudice Shapiro, violin; Los Angeles Percussion Ensemble, William Kraft conducting. Crystal S-853. Janna Lower, violin; Continuum Percussion Quartet, Richard Brown conducting. New World 80382.

La Koro Sutro. P Brett conducting. New Albion NA 015.

Piano Concerto. Keith Jarrett, piano; New Japan Philharmonic, Naoto Otomo conducting.

*Suite for Violin, Piano and Small Orchestra*. Keith Jarrett, piano; Lucy Stoltzman, violin; Robert Hughes conducting. New World 80366-2.

*Song of Quetzalcoatl*. Manhattan Percussion Ensemble, Paul Price conducting. Orion 642.

*Suite for Cello and Harp*. Seymour Barab, cello; Lucille Lawrence, harp. New World 281.

Suite for Percussion. Manhattan Percussion Ensemble, Paul Price conducting. CRI S-252.

*Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra*. Anahid Ajemian, violin; Maro Ajemian, piano, orchestra, Leopold Stokowski conducting. CRI SD-114.

*Symphony on G*. Royal Philharmonic, Gerhard Samuel conducting. CRI SD-236.

### **Henry Cowell**

*The Banshee* (1925), *Aeolian Harp* (1923). *Piano Piece (Pans 1924)*. Robert Miller, piano. New World 80203-2.

*Ostinato Pianissimo*, for percussion orchestra (1934). New Jersey Percussion Ensemble. Nonesuch 71291. Würzburger Percussion Ensemble. Thorofon CTH 2003.

*Quartet Euphometric* (1916-1919). The Emerson String Quartet. New World 80453-2.

*Quartet Romantic* (1915-1917). Members of Speculum Musicae. New World 80285-2.

### **Harvey Sollberger**

*Angel and Stone*. Harvey Sollberger, flute, Aleck Karis, piano. CRI S-463.

*Chamber Variations*. Columbia University Group for Contemporary Music, Gunther Schuller conducting. CRI SD-204.

*Divertimento*. Harvey Sollberger, flute; Fred Sherry, cello; Charles Wuorinen, piano. CRI S-319.

*Sunflowers*. Harvey Sollberger, flute; Claire Heldrich, vibraphone. New World 80541-2.

### **Lukas Foss**

*Baroque Variations*. Buffalo Philharmonic, Lukas Foss conducting. Nonesuch 71202.

*Capriccio*. Gregor Piatigorsky, cello; Lukas Foss, piano. New World 80281-2.  
*Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*. Bert Gassman, oboe; Crystal Chamber Orchestra, Akira Endo conducting. Crystal S-851.  
*Orpheus and Euridice; Renaissance Flute Concerto; Salomon Rossi Suite*. Yehudi Menuhin and Edna Michell, violins (*Orpheus*); Carol Wincenc, flute; Brooklyn Philharmonic, Lukas Foss, conducting. New World 80375-2.  
*Psalms; Behold! I Build an House*. Roger Wagner Chorale. CRI SD-123.  
*The Song of Song's*. Jennie Tourel, mezzo-soprano; New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein conducting. CRI SD- 284E.  
String Quartet No.3. Columbia Quartet. CRI S-413.  
*Time Cycle*. Adele Addison, soprano; Lukas Foss, piano; Howard Colf, cello; Richard Dufallo, clarinet; Charles Delancey, vibraphone; New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein conducting. Columbia CSP-AMS-6280.

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Salzman, Eric. "The Many Lives of Lukas Foss." *Saturday Review* no.50 (February 25,1967). p. 73ff.

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**The New Music Consort**, directed by Claire Heldrich and Madeleine Shapiro, was formed in 1975 to perform twentieth-century music and to nurture young composers through commissions and premieres. The Consort has performed over 300 works of all genres, 45 of which were written for the ensemble. The Consort has given an annual series of concerts at Carnegie Recital Hall under the auspices of the Carnegie Hall Corporation. It has received six touring grants and three recording grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, and it participated in the first New Music Network tour sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts.

**1. JOHN CAGE and LOU HARRISON: Double Music** 6:33 (publ. C.F. Peters Corp. and Henmar Press Inc.) Joseph Grable, Kory Grossman, Claire Heldrich, William Trigg, percussion

**2. JOHN CAGE: Second Construction** 7:18 (publ. Henmar Press inc.) Joseph Grable, Kory Grossman, Claire Heldrich, William Trigg, percussion.

**3. JOHN CAGE: Third Construction** 9:57 (publ. Henmar Press, Inc.) Joseph Grable, Claire Heidrich, Mark Rendon, William Trigg, percussion

**4. HENRY COWELL: Pulse** 4:00 (publ. Music for Percussion, Inc.) Joseph Grable, Kory Grossman, Michael Pugliese, Mark Rendon, William Trigg, Terri Weber; percussion; Claire Heldrich, conductor

**5. HARVEY SOLLBERGER: The Two and The One** 11:39 (publ. American Composers Alliance) Madeleine Shapiro, cello; Joseph Grable, William Trigg, percussion; Claire Heldrich, conductor

**6. LUKAS FOSS: Percussion Quartet** 18:26 (publ. Carl Fischer Inc.)

INTRODUCTION SONG RECITATIVE MONSTERS DANCE Joseph Grable, Kory Grossman, James Preiss, William Trigg, percussion q 1990

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TEL 212.290-1680 FAX 212.290-1685  
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