

DREAM SEQUENCE
Chamber Music of
ANDREW IMBRIE

New World Records 80441

As the new millennium approaches, we can begin to assess the impact of modern communications technology upon our culture. Today, we seem to share a communal sense of historical advantage, a naive self-assuredness manifest in perceptions and attitudes throughout the art world. For example, given the instant accessibility of new works to the widest imaginable audience, many people seem to doubt the possibility that truly important creators continue to labor in obscurity. Indeed, nothing need escape public notice nowadays. And as telecommunications provide us with the means to announce the arrival of every new Beethoven and Michelangelo, we have latterly been identifying geniuses in record number.

Not surprisingly, our eagerness in this regard has created a new kind of problem. Advanced communications technologies are too easily and too frequently employed to magnify the ephemeral. This explains not only their indispensability to popular culture, but also the introduction of alien criteria into aesthetic issues. It is not surprising, then, that the standards for success and failure in classical music have increasingly resembled those previously reserved for popular music. Today, performers and composers alike are subject to quantitative scrutiny; the number of weeks on the Billboard charts has become significant unto itself, a de facto conferral of relevance, if not quality.

On the other hand, the arts media have been known for their generosity in bestowing sainthood upon certain artists less successful in achieving commercial success. The requisite credentials here are that works properly reflect current political or social values, or that the lives and struggles of the artists provide a framework within which the actual works themselves should be understood. In both cases, the artist's achievements are measured by the degree to which these manifestos or melodramas are explicitly evident.

Regardless of one's position, it must be owned that these developments have profoundly affected the fine arts. In music, populist pieties have been thrashed against the whipping post of academia to produce the most sterile of polemical questions: For whom is music being written? But is a public dialogue really needed to reveal that a creator who cannot communicate with *anyone* is unlikely able to communicate with himself?

In any event, composers themselves are not interested in propaganda, not good ones, anyway. Standing among these is Andrew Imbrie, whose independence and singularity of purpose have endowed a prodigious output that awaits wider discovery. Appropriate recognition has also eluded Imbrie thus far because he is not an inventor, in the sense of those whose work tends to challenge or redefine convention. Imbrie's method of composing is not in and of itself remarkable. He is, rather, of a tradition wherein achievement is measured in terms of individuality, depth of expression, and craft. Indeed, only in this century has the fetish of the avant-garde taken such hold over our priorities.

In short, Andrew Imbrie's concerns are exclusively aesthetic. His music reveals a preoccupation with line, which in turn generates form, harmony, and color. Line also motivates the forward motion and energy that characterizes so much of his music. Imbrie refers to a boyhood infatuation with the

luscious harmonies of the great impressionists as pivotal in understanding what makes his own music work. Those were not just beautiful chords in Ravel's music: The individual voices shared an important linear function as well.

Imbrie has fashioned an unmistakable language that is, unsurprisingly, far less difficult to identify than to describe. The music is neither tonal nor completely atonal. He is not, as some have written, a serialist: He composes by ear; his music is lyrical; he fashions large-scale works out of small motives. Here and there, the listener can detect the gestures and harmonies of jazz, though the references are subtle and well integrated. Imbrie's expressive breadth is wide, often fantastical, and always fresh and unique.

Andrew Imbrie was born on April 6, 1921, in New York City. Raised in Princeton, New Jersey, he began piano studies at an early age. He demonstrated a precocious creative talent, learning composition with Leo Ornstein in 1930. After a summer of training at Fountainsbleau with Nadia Boulanger, he studied with Roger Sessions at Princeton University. Sessions was very important to the young composer's development in these early years. Imbrie followed his mentor to the University of California at Berkeley, where he received his masters degree and a faculty appointment in 1947. That same year he received the Prix de Rome. He remained at Berkeley until his retirement in 1991.

Imbrie has garnered prizes and commissions too innumerable to recite here. His collected works include two operas, a requiem, three symphonies, seven concerti, five string quartets, and various pieces for orchestra, chamber ensemble, chorus, solo instruments, and voice.

This collection of five chamber compositions spans a twenty-six-year period beginning in 1961. Together, they testify to a highly individual presence, a voice expressively adaptable to a variety of media.

Dream Sequence, for a mixed chamber ensemble of eight instrumentalists, was completed in 1986. Commissioned by Frank Taplin, the work was premiered by Parnassus in 1987. The piece is cast in three movements, a traditional construction Imbrie favors.

"Dream sequence" was a term commonly used in Hollywood to denote an episode in a film that would cut away from the principal narrative action to a dream or a fantasy. The first movement at times suggests a dimming of consciousness, nightmarish confrontations, flights of fantasy. An insistent bird call featuring oboe and piano is later recalled by the piccolo.

The second movement, an impetuous scherzo, shows Imbrie at his least predictable. It is at turns playful, passionate, and grotesque. Dreamlike images continue to flash and disappear. The composer even introduces *Arirang*, Korea's best known folk tune, into the mix. After accumulating considerable force and momentum, the movement dissolves into mystery, setting the stage for a lyrical epilogue.

Composed in 1980, *Five Roethke Songs* traces a young girl's journey into womanhood. The portrayal begins with a character unaware of passion and its consequences: The Young Girl--timid, yet eager. Bound up in her own sensations, she muses uncertainly over imminent discoveries. The culmination of her experience is reached in the fourth song: "Like a Phoenix, sure of my body" represents both the textural and musical point of arrival. The last song communicates a sense of quietude born of mature

awareness: She is no longer the center of the universe. Imbrie's imaginative interpretation of Roethke's poems has rendered a powerful musical statement. The impact is immediate and complete.

Three Piece Suite, the lightest work in this collection, is scored for piano and harp. Composed in 1987 for Ann Adams and Jane Galante, the Suite is winsome, witty, and highly conversational. In this work the two instruments are just as likely to lose their identities within each other as to project their own individual characteristics.

Campion Songs, for vocal quartet with piano accompaniment, mirrors the perfumed hyperbole of Thomas Campion's romantic poetic seductions. Campion himself was a composer, of course, and it is very likely that he wrote these poems for his own musical setting. The tempo and meter scheme of the three movements in Imbrie's setting vaguely resemble those of the *Dream Sequence*. *Campion Songs* was composed in 1981 for the Liederkreis Ensemble.

To A Traveler, for clarinet, violin, and piano, takes its title from Kenneth Rexroth's translation of an allegorical poem by Su Tung P'o. The poem suggests the passage of time and the departure of a friend. The composition dates from 1971 and received its first performance in 1972 by the San Francisco Contemporary Music players.

Although fashioned in one continuous movement, three main sections (slow-fast-slow) are clearly perceptible. Toward the end of the fast section, the violin leads the piece to a passionate climax, only to disappear. The ensuing return of the lyrical opening material is made more poignant by the violin's sudden absence. Indeed, this was intended to represent the departed traveler, Norman Fromm, to whose memory the work is dedicated.

This collection will, we hope, convince the serious listener that it is only a matter of time before Andrew Imbrie's music becomes better known outside of the professional music circles where it is now celebrated: His work will transcend its immediate context and find a following on its own terms.

—Anthony Korf

CAMPION SONGS

O never to be moved

O never to be moved,
O beauty unrelenting!
Hard heart, too dearly loved;
Fond love, too late repenting!
Why did I dream of too much bliss?
Deceitful hope was cause of this.
O hear me speak this, and no more:
Live you in joy, while I my woes deplore.

All comforts despaired
Distaste your bitter scorning;
Great sorrows unrepaired

Admit no mean in mourning:
Die, wretch, since hope from thee is fled:
He that must die is better dead.
O dear delight, yet ere I die,
Some pity show, though you relief deny.

Fire, fire, fire, fire!

Fire, fire, fire, fire!
Love, here I burn in such desire
That all the tears that I can strain
Out of mine idle empty brain
Cannot allay my scorching pain.
Come *Trent*, and *Humber*, and fair *Thames*,
Dread Ocean, haste with all thy streams:
And, if you cannot quench my fire,
O drown both me and my desire.

Fire, fire, fire, fire!
There is no hell to my desire:
See, all the Rivers backward fly,
And the Ocean doth his waves deny,
For fear my heat should drink them dry.
Come, heavenly showers, then, pouring down;
Come, you that once the world did drown:
Some then you spared, but now save all,
That else must burn, and with me fall.

Come, O come, my life's delight

Come, O come, my life's delight,
Let me not in langour pine:
Love loves no delay: thy sight,
The more enjoyed, the more divine.
O come, and take from me
The pain of being deprived of thee.

Thou all sweetness dost enclose,
Like a little world of bliss:
Beauty guards thy looks: the Rose
In them pure and eternal is.
Come then, and make thy flight
As swift to me as heavenly light.

Parnassus was formed in 1974 by Anthony Korf. Comprised of New York's freelance musical elite, the group has provided an important forum for contemporary music through its highly acclaimed New York City concert series. To date, Parnassus has presented over 150 new works and toured many of

the U.S.'s most prestigious universities and concert halls. The ensemble has maintained an active commissioning program since its inception, and has recorded for CRI, Koch International, and New World Records.

Anthony Korf is regarded as a leading interpreter of modern music. From seminal pieces of the twentieth century to new works, Korf has assembled a rich and varied repertory. Founder and conductor of Parnassus, he is also Artistic Director of New York's Riverside Symphony. As a composer, Korf's honors include a Koussevitsky commission and a Goddard Lieberon Fellowship from the American Composers Orchestra and San Francisco Symphony. His music has been recorded for CRI, New World Records, and Summit Records.

The soprano **Susan Narucki** has appeared frequently with Parnassus since 1990. An artist of exceptional versatility, she has earned international recognition as an interpreter of twentieth century music. She has been a featured soloist with such orchestras as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Concentus Musicus Wien, and the Hungarian National Philharmonic. Narucki has also performed at the Holland Festival, Ojai Festival, International Bartok Festival, the Munich Biennale, and London's Meltdown Festival.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Impromptu. Robert Gross, violin; Richard Grayson, piano. Orion ORS 73107.

Legend. San Francisco Symphony, Enrique Jorda, conductor. CRI 152.

On the Beach at Night. Gregg Smith Singers, Orpheus Ensemble, Gregg Smith, conductor. Vox SVBX 5354.

Pilgrimage. Collage New Music, Gunther Schuller, conductor. GM 2019 CD.

Short Story. L. Amper, piano. Neuma 450-81.

String Quartet No. 4. Emerson String Quartet. New World 80453-2.

Symphony No. 3. London Symphony Orchestra, Harold Farberman, conductor. CRI 632 CD.

Tell Me Where is Fancy Bred. Rosalind Rees, soprano; Richard Wagner, cello; David Starobin, guitar. Turnabout TVS 34727.

Trio No. 2 for Piano, Violin, and Cello. Francesco Trio. Music and Arts Programs of America CD 756.

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Engineer: Adam Abeshouse; Paul Zinman (*Dream Sequence*).

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CHAMBER MUSIC OF ANDREW IMBRIE (b. 1921) 80441-2

PARNASSUS ANTHONY KORF, Conductor

Dream Sequence (publ. C. F. Peters)

- 1 Allegro Assai 11:05
- 2 Misterioso 6:09
- 3 Adagio 6:25

Keith Underwood, flute; Matt Dine, oboe & English horn; Alan R. Kay, clarinet & bass clarinet; James Preiss, percussion; Edmund Niemann, piano; Cyrus Stevens, violin; Sarah Adams, viola; Chris Finckel, cello; Anthony Korf, conductor.

Five Roethke Songs (publ. C. F. Peters)

- 4 The Young Girl 2:13
- 5 Her Words 2:07
- 6 The Apparition 2:28
- 7 Her Longing 3:45
- 8 Her Time 4:22

Susan Narucki, soprano; Martin Goldray, piano.

Three Piece Suite

- 9 Allegro Moderato 2:05
- 10 Andante con Moto 3:27
- 11 Allegro Fantastico 2:08

Barbara Allen, harp; Edmund Niemann, piano.

Campion Songs

12 O Never to Be Moved 3:22

13 Fire, Fire, Fire, Fire 3:05

14 Come, O Come My Life's Delight 2:12

Joan Peterson, soprano; Nancy Wertsch, alto; Mark Bleeke, tenor; Nathaniel Watson, baritone; Anthony Korf, conductor.

15 *To A Traveler* (publ. Shawnee Press. © 1975 Malcom Music, Inc.) 8:45

Alan R. Kay, clarinet; Cyrus Stevens, violin; Edmund Niemann, piano.

All compositions BMI.

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