

STEPHEN HARTKE
The King of The Sun

New World Records 80461

Stephen Hartke, born July 6, 1952, in Orange, New Jersey, was raised in Manhattan, where he began his musical career as a professional boy soprano. As a member of the boys' choir of the Church of the Transfiguration (The Little Church Around the Corner) he sang with the New York Pro Musica, the Metropolitan Opera, the New York Philharmonic, and other organizations. Hartke began his compositional studies in New York with Leonardo Balada at the United Nations International School. At Yale University, where he received his undergraduate degree, Hartke's principal teachers were James Drew and Alejandro Planchart. He earned advanced degrees in composition at the University of Pennsylvania with George Rochberg and with Edward Applebaum and Peter Racine Fricker at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

After working in music publishing on the East Coast and spending a year in Brazil as visiting professor at the University of São Paulo on a Fulbright Senior Scholars Fellowship, Hartke joined the music faculty of the University of Southern California in 1987. He served four seasons as composer-in-residence with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and in 1991 was awarded the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome. Hartke has also received an ASCAP Foundation grant, a Kennedy Center Friedheim Award, a Louisville Orchestra Prize, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, and many other honors.

Stephen Hartke is concerned not with effect, but with affect, not with novel sounds or concepts but with *all* the sounds, concepts, and experiences that affect him and could affect his listeners. He is not eclectic, but synthesistic. His background, from its precocious beginnings in New York to its professional and scholastic direction ever since, might lead the listener to expect an insular, self-consciously conservative or pretentiously "experimental" style. However, such is not the case. Hartke's music capitalizes not only on the breadth of his musical experience and on his general erudition, but also on the musical experience of his generation, which grew up enjoying access through recordings and broadcasts to many different musical eras, genres and languages. Where another composer might respond to this embarrassment of musical riches with pastiche, theoretical game-playing, technical experiment and elaborate mannerisms of all kinds, Hartke manifests his exposure to myriad musics--and to other modes of expression--by forging an integral musical voice of his own.

One rudimentary but significant synthesis Hartke realizes in his work is that of melody with color. Such a combination might be regarded as a reconciliation of popular and avant garde idioms, but in his composing it is organic. Rather than thinking of color as a substitute for melodic or even harmonic profile, Hartke sees it as a crucial and natural source of resonance and contrast. (In this respect he reflects the influence of two of modern music's great individualists, Bartók and Messiaen.) He achieves his color through astringent instrumentation (the professed influence of Stravinsky) and a liberal employment of unusual (if no longer untraditional) instrumental sounds--high partial string harmonics, for instance, or the manual damping of piano strings. Color for Hartke is at once a harmonic function and a distinctive presence, the spice that brings out melodic piquancy.

Because of its association with popular songwriting, melody has played an awkward role in recent classical music. Composers have tended either to avoid it or to emphasize it, thus declaring their distance from or affinity for pop music. Hartke is one of a growing number of concert-music composers who refuse to worry about the distinction anymore--who accept that, in its many guises, pop music is a ubiquitous presence in contemporary civilization, at once background noise and foreground lingua franca. The resulting sonic environment gives younger composers "permission" to concern themselves with melody, and prompts them to think melodically as a matter of course.

Hartke is, of course, also disposed toward melody as a result of his childhood choral career. (In this respect he recapitulates the experience of another influence, Benjamin Britten, down to the shared youthful involvement in Anglican choral liturgy.) Hartke attributes a signal characteristic of his melodies, the tendency to move by major seconds and other more singable intervals, to his training as a chorister. His responsiveness to a variety of melodic musical styles, from plainchant to jazz to Alban Berg's expressionism to the modality of both North European Renaissance and prewar American modernist composers, also accounts for his music's melodic stress and lyrical character.

Interestingly, Hartke maintains this lyricism without relying on lyrical phrasing. In fact, his phrasing is abrupt and angular, impelled by lively, often unpredictable syncopation. The jazz influence is evident here, as is that of various indigenous and hybrid musics--gamelan, samba--and especially pre-Renaissance polyphony. Hartke attributes his use of metric complexity in achieving this syncopation to the example of Charles Ives, among others. Ives also provides a general model of undogmatic thought and procedure permitting, even encouraging, the coincidence of disparate sonic references. For Hartke, Ives emancipated not just dissonance, but consonance as well.

Hartke's reliance on direct quotation is less than Ives's, however, and certainly less pronounced than that of George Rochberg. Still, Rochberg's practice, which has itself become more complex and idiomatic, has served as something of an ideological model for his former student. Hartke's approach to the past, to musical 'pastness', is based not on deliberate anachronism but, again, on the synthesis of available musical languages, old and new, classical and popular, Western and non-Western.

In this regard Hartke's approach is more like that of John Harbison. Harbison's intricate yet consistent approach to tonality, melody, rhythm, and reference directly prefigures Hartke's. *Confinement*, Harbison's first, almost programmatic foray into a synthesistic realm, made a profound impression on the youthful Hartke. Like Harbison's, Hartke's music bristles with syncopation, displays a dissonant chromaticism that alternates dramatically between bright and dark, and assumes an imagistic quality and discursive rhetoric, in contrast with the narrative, formalist, or process driven, or even extra-musical modes that have dominated most new concert music.

Many of these qualities come from Hartke's affection for non-Western musics, most notably Gagaku and Korean court performance, Indonesian gamelan and Brazilian popular forms. They are also an outcome of his deep interest in visual art. This has resulted in several compositions based on artworks, including *The King of the Sun*, recorded here.

This richness of expression, beginning around the time of the *Sonata-Variations*, is quite deliberate.

He has sought to manifest multiple sensations, observations, and affects in single pieces, a fairly unusual approach in contemporary music. As a result, as his performers have often observed, no two of Hartke's pieces seem alike. There is a marked variety of affect not just among his compositions but also within them. This condition is amplified by his tendency to organize his melodic phrases episodically, even quasi-repetitively, although not without development. In this respect Hartke evinces an appreciation of the work of certain of the less formalistic minimalists, notably Louis Andriessen and, to a lesser extent, John Adams. His appreciation for Messiaen's music is the primary factor here, however, reflecting his love of brilliant sonority and eccentric rhythm.

The *Sonata-Variations* for violin and piano, written in 1983-84, is an early example of Hartke's "mature style". He quite consciously attempts dialectical resolutions of twentieth-century antitheses: tonality versus dissonance, classicism versus romanticism, intuition versus systematization. The title of the piece itself indicates an oppositional bifurcation of organizational principles, posing the classical sonata idea against theme-and-variations.

The *Sonata-Variations* also asserts the rudiments of the composer's current approach by using melody, a particular melody, as the central generative element. While it could not exactly be called hummable, consisting as it does of a chain of alternating intervals of ninths and sevenths which produce two diatonic voices moving in dissonant counterpoint, there is a "hummable" nucleus to this spiky melody, a lyrical and even poignant turn of phrase that harks back to the highly romantic (and also distinctly American) modernism of Copland, Barber, and Bernstein. This is as apparent in the nervous, pulsing second movement as it is in the fluid, ruminative first movement; the thematic continuity that Hartke maintains between the movements despite their evident contrast recalls the sometimes startling mood changes in Barber's sonatas and concertos, while the phrasing and many of the sonorities are reminiscent of Copland's earlier chamber works.

The picturesque quality of the *Sonata-Variations* becomes a motivating consideration in the two more recent pieces on this recording. *The King of the Sun* is inspired by paintings, and *Night Rubrics* is a painting, an abstract tone poem in miniature. The devilish sevenths and ninths of the *Sonata-Variations* recur, as do the skittish, throbbing passages and the curious repetition of phrases that evokes less an actual acoustic echo than an "echo in the mind."

All the events represented sonically in *Night Rubrics* take place in the mind. As the title implies, the piece reflects nocturnal musings, thoughts set in motion by external stimuli--a distant car horn, for example, or a dog's bark--and evolving almost on their own. These are the thoughts that occupy the vast and varied terrain lying between sleep and wakefulness; some are the product of insomniac anxiety, others the fleeting insight or image induced by a limb spasm or the brief snore of one's companion. In either extreme, alertness does not provide the same clarity of reason that it does in daylight. One's solitude reflects back at one, and, if sleep is not forthcoming, one can watch one's own thoughts spiraling off in all directions. Obviously, a solo instrument properly embodies such a benighted protagonist, ideally an instrument that, like the cello, has resonance and complexity.

The King of the Sun finds Hartke in a much more humorous spirit. His is a wry wit, laced here with erudite reference and intricate, near-Nabokovian game-playing. The work is based on two entirely different sources, several paintings by the Spanish Surrealist painter Joan Miró and a canon fragment misattributed to the late-medieval Flemish composer Johannes Ciconia. The two sources bear the

most tenuous of relationships to each other: the Netherlandish provenance of the canon bridges to the subject of the second movement Miró's *Dutch Interior*, itself a trope on a genre scene by the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Jan Steen.

It is actually misleading to call the Miró paintings the "subjects" of *The King of the Sun*. Hartke has derived the musical imagery of five of the five and a half movements not so much from the paintings as from their titles. The selection of paintings spans several styles Miró adopted over the course of his career, although most referred to here are from the 1940s and later, when Miró gave his paintings extravagant titles such as *Personages in the night guided by the phosphorescent tracks of snails* (the first movement) and *The flames of the sun make the desert flower hysterical* (the fourth movement). The titles suffice to clue the listener in to Hartke's sonic iconography--although certain musical images, such as the gnarled little "snail" theme that opens the piece, recur in several places.

This freewheeling, albeit deliberate, misinterpretation of Miró's work mirrors the pseudo-Ciconia canon, or, rather, the scholarly misconstructions it has accrued. The piquant polyphonic morsel, cited clearly at the end of the fourth movement but also heard in the second, is actually a mistranscription. Even the Miróesque title of Hartke's piece is someone else's mistranslation of *Le ray au soleyl* ("The sun's ray"), the title our pseudo-Ciconia gave to his loose canon.

—Peter Frank

Peter Frank is editor of *Visions art quarterly*, and art critic for the L.A. Weekly and the Long Beach Press-Telegram. His *Something Else Press: An Annotated Bibliography* was published by McPherson & Co. -Documentext in 1983. *A cycle of poems*, The Travelogues, was issued by Sun & Moon Press in 1982. Abbeville Press released his *New, Used & Improved*, an overview of the mass-mediated New York art scene in the 1980s, co-written with Michael McKenzie. Frank has known Stephen Hartke and his music for almost thirty years.

The Dunsmuir Piano Quartet was formed in 1986 and performed its first concerts in June 1987 in Oakland, California, at the historic Dunsmuir House, from which the ensemble took its name. Since its founding, the quartet, consisting of Ronald Copes, violin, Roxann Jacobson, viola, Jennifer Culp, cello, and Justin Blasdale, piano, has rapidly gained a reputation as one of the West Coast's foremost chamber ensembles, dedicated to the highest quality performance of new works and of standard masterworks for piano quartet. Their commitment to new music is shown in a repertory that includes works by Gunther Schuller, Ursula Mamlok, Phillip Ramey, Kamran Ince, John Corigliano, Alfred Schnittke, and Lou Harrison, as well as commissioned works from Ingram Marshall and Thomas Sleeper. In addition to its home concert series in Berkeley, which has been recognized since 1989 with annual grants from the California Arts Council, the Dunsmuir Piano Quartet concertizes extensively outside the Bay Area.

James Bonn, professor of piano at the University of Southern California, has chaired the keyboard departments of three universities and has had a distinguished career as a piano soloist, chamber musician, lecture recitalist, and master class clinician. He has appeared as guest soloist with such conductors as Dennis Russell Davies, Antal Dorati, Arthur Fiedler, and Daniel Lewis, performing more than 30 works from the concerto repertory. In addition to his lifelong interest in all things relating to the piano, Bonn's 30 years of violin playing are partially responsible for his love of

chamber music. His success as an ensemble pianist spans concerts with violinist David Zinman in 1956 and recent tours and recordings with the Los Angeles Piano Quartet.

Praised by audiences and critics alike for his insightful artistry, violinist **Ronald Copes** has received international acclaim as a concerto soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician, having appeared as a featured performer in the Marlboro, Bermuda, Cheltenham, Colorado, and Kneisel Hall festivals. Copes has toured extensively with Music from Marlboro ensembles, the Los Angeles Piano Quartet, and the Dunsmuir Piano Quartet, and has recorded numerous solo and chamber works, including Stephen Hartke's *Ob Them Rats Is Mean In My Kitchen* on New World Records. He is currently professor of violin at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and is on the faculty of the Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival during the summers.

Cellist **Angela Schwartz** began her professional studies at the University of Michigan, graduating with high distinction in 1973. Under a DAAD grant she went on to work with André Navarra at the Northwest German Music Academy, and since that time has made her home in Europe. She has been a prizewinner in international competitions in Florence, Moscow, and Geneva. From 1976 to 1978 she was principal cellist of the Württemberg Chamber Orchestra, and from 1978 to 1988, principal cellist of the Basel Symphony Orchestra. As a member of the Berne String Quartet and the Musikfabrik Nordrhein/Westfalen, she has been particularly involved with contemporary music, and has appeared in festivals in Berlin, Stuttgart, Dresden, Paris, Milan, and Warsaw.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Caoine; Iglesia abandonada. Ronald Copes, violin; Lisa Stidham, soprano. Orion ORS 84470.

Ob Them Rats Is Mean In My Kitchen. Michelle Makarski, Ronald Copes, violins. New World Records NW 80391-2.

Wir küssen Ihnen tausendmal die Hände. Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Donald Crockett conducting. CRI CD669.

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Crockett, Donald. "Conversations in Los Angeles," *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 10 no. 1 (1994): American Composers: The Next Generation.

Ginell, Richard. "Stephen Hartke Is in Tune With Music." *Los Angeles Daily News*. September 23, 1988.

LaFave, Kenneth. "Daring to be Tonal: Hartke's 'Maltese Cat Blues'." *The Kansas City Star*. October 30, 1988.

Watkins, Glenn. *Pyramids at the Louvre*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994.

The King of the Sun recorded October 2 and 3, 1994, at the Chapel of the College of Notre Dame, Belmont, California

Producer: Stephen Hartke

Engineer: Tom Johnson (Johnson Digital Audio)

Editing: Steve Santana (Peake Audio)

Night Rubrics recorded August 29, 1994, at Tituskirche, Basel, Switzerland

Tonmeister: Shepherd Mead

Editing: Jürg Jecklin

Sonata-Variations recorded November 25-27, 1994, at Hancock Auditorium, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California

Producer: Michelle Makarski

Engineer: James Bonn

Editing: Matthew Snyder (Alpine Recordings)

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STEPHEN HARTKE (b. 1952) 80461-2

The King of the Sun (1988) (19:43)

1 1. Personages in the night guided by the phosphorescent tracks of snails (2:16)

2 2. Dutch interior (2:57)

3 3. Dancer listening to the organ in a Gothic cathedral (6:01)

4 Interlude (0:50)

5 4. The flames of the sun make the desert flower hysterical (3:32)

6 5. Personages and birds rejoicing at the arrival of night (4:05)

The Dunsmuir Piano Quartet

Ronald Copes, violin; Roxann Jacobson, viola; Jennifer Culp, cello; Justin Blasdale,
piano

Night Rubrics (1990) (15:31)

7 1. Nocturnes (8:32)

- 8 2. Envoi (6:59)
Angela Schwartz, cello
Sonata-Variations (1984) (27:16)
9 1. Andante: Theme, Variations 1-4 (10:55)
10 2. Introduction, Rondo and Finale: Variations 5-15 (16:21)
Ronald Copes, violin; James Bonn, piano

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