

DONAL FOX

(b. 1952)

GONE CITY

PRESENTED BY VIDEMUS

1 **RIVER TOWN PACKIN HOUSE BLUES (1993)** (4:30)

Fox/Troupe Duo: Quincy Troupe, poet/reader; Donal Fox, piano

2 **T-CELL COUNTDOWN (1993)** (3:41)

William Brown, tenor; Donal Fox, piano; John Lockwood, double bass

GONE CITY (CONCERT VERSION) (1994)

Ballet in three movements

3 **I Allegro Assai** (8:31)

4 **II Andante** (8:44)

5 **III Scherzo, Macabre** (3:27)

Eric Thomas, clarinet; Donal Fox, piano; John Lockwood, double bass

6 **THE OLD PEOPLE SPEAK OF DEATH (1993)** (5:11)

Fox/Troupe Duo: Quincy Troupe, poet/reader; Donal Fox, piano

7 **BALLADE FOR CLARINET AND PIANO (1993)** (4:33)

Eric Thomas, clarinet; Donal Fox, piano

8 **JAZZ SETS WITH T.T. (1991)** (7:49)

Oliver Lake, alto saxophone; Donal Fox, piano

9 **FOLLOWING THE NORTH STAR BOOGALOO (1993)** (5:57)

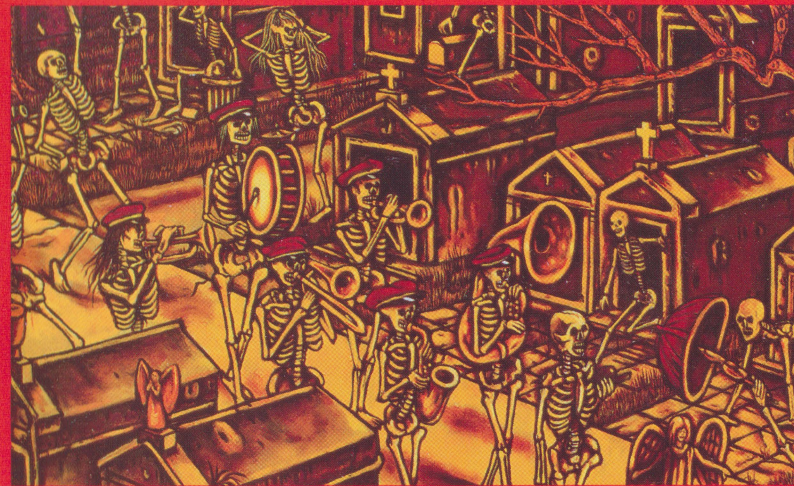
Fox/Troupe Duo: Quincy Troupe, poet/reader; Donal Fox, piano

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DONAL FOX



GONE CITY



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Poor Boy Blue,
the Great White World
and the Black Bourgeoisie
have shoved the Negro artist into
the white and not-white dichotomy,
the Afroamerican-dilemma in the Arts—
the dialectic of
to be or not to be
a Negro.

M. B. Tolson, Harlem Gallery (1965)

The question of identity haunts all composers regardless of race or nationality. Traditionally, the choice is bound by one's culture and reflects both nationality and ethnic lineage. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1952, Donal Fox is the product of a multiracial family. Both parents were musical. His mother, Lodiana E. Fox, studied violin and sang in choruses in her native Panama. She came to America at age 20 to study philosophy at Boston University. There she met Herbert Leon Fox, a man of Russian Jewish descent. Herbert Fox had played both classical and jazz clarinet in high school and college and studied composition at Boston University before majoring in physics. When Donal Fox was eight years old, he began piano lessons with Edna Ida Itkin and studied with her for two years. He continued formal piano lessons at the New England Conservatory of Music with the French pianist Jeanette Giguere until he was nineteen. As a very young musician, he improvised with his father. These improvisatory sessions influenced Fox's attitudes toward music. At home, music of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Bartók, and Stravinsky existed side by side with the music of Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Bud Powell, and Thelonious Monk. The young composer discovered a duality in which classical music and jazz had an equal importance.

As a teenager, Donal Fox witnessed the turbulent Sixties. Influenced by the social consciousness of his parents, by a stimulating musical environment, and pivotal events in America, Fox was emerging as a clearly focused personality. At the age of 22, Fox and another African-American pianist and conductor, Reginald Hubbard, formed Fox-Hubbard Associates and initiated a concert series featuring all six Brandenburg concertos by Bach and several composers forums featuring Fox's early compositional work.

At this time, Donal Fox's distinct musical talent came to my attention. Before studying composition with me, he studied counterpoint and fugue with Avram David. Later, he studied composition and orchestration with Gunther Schuller. From Schuller, Fox learned to combine jazz with classical idioms; his study with me combined techniques from various traditions. Ultimately, all composers choose their own musical ancestry. Fox owes much of his originality and creativity to being primarily self-taught.

In the Seventies and Eighties, the Boston area was simmering with high-quality chamber music. Boston Musica Viva, Collage, Videmus, Dinosaur Annex, and Composers in Red Sneakers performed new music with a high degree of professionalism. Under the direction of Vivian Taylor, Videmus recognized Donal Fox's creativity and frequently performed his music.

His solo piano composition, *Refutation and Hypothesis I, a Treatise for Piano Solo* (1981), was premiered by Collage, with Stephen Drury as pianist, and later performed by Vivian Taylor in Videmus' inaugural season. A two-piano work, *Dialectics*, was commissioned by Ms. Taylor. Several performances of his duos for clarinet and piano and concert improvisations followed.

Poet and Pulitzer Prize-winning music critic Lloyd Schwartz says: "Fox is one of the most exciting musical personalities on the current scene." For his creativity on the piano and as a composer, he was awarded a two-year residency with the Saint Louis Symphony (1991-93), was special guest of the Library of Congress (1993-94 season), a visiting artist at Harvard University (1993-94), and was awarded the prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship in Music Composition (1997). He has collaborated with Oliver Lake (alto saxophone), John Stubblefield (tenor saxophone), Eric Thomas (clarinet), Quincy Troupe (poet), David Murray (tenor saxophone, bass clarinet), Billy Pierce (tenor saxophone), and Miquel Algarin (poet). Fox's temporal relationship with the other performer in a duo enables him to create a balance that is sensitive and meticulous in detail. At times, he is intense and cunningly playful, and with his wide harmonic vocabulary he can display a tender lyricism or be explosive and insistent. These techniques all come into play whether he is playing as an equal with another player, accompanying, or interchanging ideas.

From classical music Mr. Fox derives structure and design, cadenzas, disjunct lines, ostinato, trills, development, and rubato. From jazz spring improvisation, harmony, riffs, walking bass, accents, polyrhythm, and free time. In performances, there is never an arbitrary relationship. Musical gestures appear in alternating interchange. Within the area of rhythm, beats may be stretched, time may be suspended or patterns may become insistent in a groove which might be presented in triplets, staccato, accents, or trills. Paul Berliner, in his book *Thinking in Jazz* (1994), says that an improvising musician has two characteristics: the first is that of an individual entertainer drawing upon his or her own skills and projecting a personality that is unique, while the second trait is the ability to listen to others and integrate immediately in a collective presentation. These features can be clearly observed in Donal Fox's performances with different musicians. The jazz tradition in duo stretches from Slim Gaillard, guitar, and Slam Stewart, bass, to Willie Ruff, French horn, and Dwiki Mitchell, piano. The quality that makes Donal Fox's work unusual is the constantly changing challenge created by the second performer.

To consider the act of composition as only a written tradition is a mistake. One need only look at the Baroque cadenza or a performance by Ravi Shankar. Composition is the ability

to organize sound in a linear sequence meaningful to the composer. It may be as detailed as Milton Babbitt's totally serialized scores, or as open as John Cage's chance works. In his early scores, Donal Fox paid great attention to detail and notated in the classical tradition. As he became more active as a pianist, his scores took on a high degree of freedom and made some use of graphic notation and written cues as organizing factors.

In this recording, Fox's compositional craft involves a rising fourth motive sequenced by the interval of a minor third or by a descending whole-step scale. This material is freely used within a duo. On occasion, the motive can be played together by single or repeated notes to form an interconnectedness. Contrapuntal figures usually lead to a wide-ranging harmonic vocabulary. The chords that form a harmonic rhythm function as evasions, implied cadences, or ostinato structures supporting Fox's musical intent. The variation technique involves changes in mode, passages with long ideas versus short responses, loud versus soft dynamics, disjunct versus conjunct motion and homophonic versus contrapuntal techniques. Donal Fox has been influenced by Thelonious Monk, Cecil Taylor, and two important classical scores from the Sixties: Krzysztof Penderecki's *Threnody: To the Victims of Hiroshima* and György Ligeti's *Atmospheres*.

Gone City is a collection of seven compositions, all thematically or emotionally interconnected, with the ballet as the central work. The composer states:

An early version of the first theme in the ballet appears in *Ballade for Clarinet and Piano*. The second theme of the first movement is suggested in the piano theme of *Jazz Sets with T.T.* The bass line of the second movement of the ballet also generates the harmonies used in the close of the third movement (*Scherzo, Macabre*). The last chords in this movement are the same harmonies, transposed, that open *The Old People Speak of Death*. The compositions surrounding the ballet were created independently, and often I consciously use related thematic material. Each piece has something to say about the piece before it. Vivian Taylor of Videmus brought together these recent works to form this album's particular continuity.

Many of the works rely on the improvisational skills of Fox and his collaborators, yet the carefully notated scores have an improvisational quality about them. The result is a seamless musical fabric of improvisation and composition. In fact, it is impossible to tell where the improvisational music ends and the completely notated music begins.

River Town Packin House Blues (1993), *The Old People Speak of Death* (1993), and *Following the North Star Boogaloo* (1993) represent duos with the poet Quincy Troupe, who writes in the folk literary tradition. In the first composition, Fox, inspired by the text of the poet, reinforces the words in his accompaniment. Aggressive musical gestures place him on equal footing with the poet. In *The Old People Speak of Death*, Fox becomes a romantic and renders a ballad style supportive of the poet. Themes are sustained and patterns from which the poet draws his words create an accompaniment which is "less than bone." *Following the North Star Boogaloo*, his final work with Troupe, begins inside the piano with percussive effects on the strings in a technique made famous by Henry Cowell. Boogie patterns exist in the repeated bass lines of this work. Rap is an obvious influence, yet the work goes much deeper with its attention to historical and cultural roots. The poet's basketball imagery serves as a metaphor for African-American life, and there is a howling insistence against the drug culture. Either the music or the poetry could stand on its own, but the combination of Troupe and Fox yields something unexpected.

Ballade for Clarinet and Piano is another example of a work that sounds completely notated, but it leaves room for spontaneous interaction between the players, through the skillful playing of subtones on the clarinet by Eric Thomas and simulated vocal lines on the piano. The piano supports the singing, melodic clarinet in the development of its use of compositional resources, and the result is breathtaking. The piece is built on the first theme of the ballet, the rising fourth motive.

Jazz Sets with T.T. is based on thematic pitch sets, chords, and twelve-tone series. It is a "call and response," featuring both performers as virtuosic equals. Oliver Lake's saxophone stresses ghost notes in runs, modified sequence, over blowing, lip slurs, trills, unmeasured tremolos, screams, and presto gestures. The piano matches with march and boogie-woogie influences and conceptual stride. Both musicians present cadenzas that are scintillating. While the *Ballade* is much more classical in concept, both works display Fox's inventive mind at work and his affinity with his collaborators.

In *T-Cell Countdown*, there are no improvised or aleatory parts; the score is meticulously notated. Fox is joined by the ingenious tenor William Brown, and double bassist John Lockwood. The song is about the struggle of one dealing with AIDS, presented as a wordless monodrama, progressing from agony to gentle acceptance. The present version, with tenor instead of the original soprano, uses Mr. Brown in high-range voice with occasional use of falsetto. The song becomes an emotional continuation of the agonizing cries heard in *River Town Packin House Blues*.

The central work, *Gone City*, is a concert version of a ballet in three movements, which had its premiere in 1993 by the Boston Ballet. The work was commissioned by the Boston Ballet Choreographer/Composer Collaborations Project, with Amy Spencer and Richard Colton as choreographers. Participating in this performance are Donal Fox, piano, Eric Thomas, clarinet, and John Lockwood, double bass. This work has three totally contrasting movements: Allegro Assai, Andante, and Scherzo, Macabre. In the dance scenario the choreography is more fixed than the music, because the dancers were able to rely on the improvisational talents of the musicians. Contrasting moods are created by long notes, imitations, jam session simulations, octave-doubling passages, bass articulations, and climaxes involving all the instruments in an imaginative sonic variety.

Critic Norman Weinstein (in the *Boston Phoenix*), in describing Fox's duo recording with David Murray, captured the essence of Donal Fox's unique talent when he said, "Fox thinks quickly, moves readily between chordal and 'free' frames of reference, and has a sharp improvisational intelligence that might be as rooted in Scriabin as in Tatum." Donal Fox is truly worthy of the attention of any serious listener to American music.

—T. J. Anderson, composer

VIDEMUS, with Vivian Taylor, artistic director, has achieved national recognition and acclaim as a chamber music organization through live performances, recordings, commissions, radio broadcasts, TV, and an ongoing chamber music concert series. In addition, Videmus has produced several major events, including the 1988 Boston premiere of *Xcerpts*, a concert version of the opera *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, by Anthony Davis; the T. J. Anderson 60th Birthday Celebration Concert; and the Ruth Hamilton 75th Birthday Celebration in 1997.

Composer/pianist/conductor Donal Fox has been affiliated with Videmus since its inception in 1986. The inaugural season began with a performance of Mr. Fox's solo piano composition, *Refutation and Hypothesis I*, performed by Vivian Taylor. Since that time, the organization has continued to perform and record Fox's music, including his two-piano composition *Dialectics* (commissioned through the Massachusetts Cultural Council by Vivian Taylor in 1986) and several performances by Mr. Fox of his compositions as soloist and conductor, and in duet with clarinetist Eric Thomas.

Videmus' recordings include *Works by William Grant Still* (New World Records 80399-2); the 1992 recording *Videmus: Works by T. J. Anderson, David Baker, Donal Fox, Olly Wilson* (New

World Records 80423-2); *Watch and Pray*, a recording of art songs and spirituals by African-American women composers (Koch International 3-7247-2H1); and participation in the Albany Records CD (Troy 136), *Music of George Walker*, released in November 1994.

QUINCY TROUPE (poet) is the author of nine books, including four volumes of poetry, has won two American Book Awards and a Peabody Award, and has been a featured poet on Bill Moyers' PBS television series *The Power of the Word*. A documentary on the Fox/Troupe Duo was aired on PBS television in 1994. Mr. Troupe has also collaborated with musicians Hamiet Bluiett, George Lewis, Phil Upchurch, and the late Julius Hemphill. He is a professor of creative writing, American literature, and Caribbean literature at the University of California at San Diego.

WILLIAM BROWN (tenor) has been guest soloist with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (London), Orquesta Filarmonica (Mexico), the Helsinki Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Boston Symphony, and the New York Philharmonic. He has recorded for Columbia Records, London Records, Nonesuch, Telarc, CRI, Musical Heritage, and with Videmus on New World Records. He is currently a Distinguished Professor of Voice at the University of North Florida.

ERIC THOMAS (clarinet) has a burgeoning career in both the classical and jazz fields. He has won classical music competitions in Los Angeles and the Concert Artists Guild competition in New York. Mr. Thomas has recorded with Videmus on New World, and on Albany Records, and has performed in duo with Mr. Fox in several live concerts, radio broadcasts, and recordings.

JOHN LOCKWOOD (double bass) has performed and toured with some of the great jazz musicians of this era: Freddie Hubbard, Joe Henderson, Gary Burton, Sonny Stitt, Pharaoh Sanders, Alan Dawson, Cedar Walton, and Mel Lewis. He has recorded with the Mel Lewis Big Band, Nick Brignola, Bill Pierce, James Williams, and Donal Fox. He is currently on the faculty of the New England Conservatory of Music and continues to perform and tour worldwide.

OLIVER LAKE (alto saxophone) is a member and co-founder of the famed World Saxophone Quartet and has been a featured artist on more than 50 recordings. He has appeared in duet with Donal Fox in live performances internationally, and on Mr. Fox's compositions for New World Records and the Music & Arts labels. Mr. Lake has toured Africa and Russia as a performer, and his compositions have been performed by the Brooklyn Philharmonic and the Arditti String Quartet.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- Becca's Ballad*. David Murray, tenor saxophone; Donal Fox, piano. Evidence Records 22131-2.
Dialectics for Two Grand Pianos. Vivian Taylor and John McDonald, pianos. New World 80423-2.
Duetto for Clarinet and Piano. Eric Thomas, clarinet; Donal Fox, piano. New World 80423-2.
Four Chords from T. J.'s Intermezzi. Donal Fox, piano. New World 80423-2.
Golden Ladders. David Murray, tenor saxophone; Donal Fox, piano. Evidence Records 22131-2.
Intermezzo. Oliver Lake, alto saxophone; Donal Fox, piano. Music & Arts CD-732.
Jazz Sets and Tone Rows. Oliver Lake, alto saxophone; Donal Fox, piano. New World 80423-2.
Song for Murray. David Murray, tenor saxophone; Donal Fox, piano. Evidence Records 22131-2.
Suite in Three Movements. Oliver Lake, alto saxophone; Donal Fox, piano. Music & Arts CD-732.
Vamping with T.T. David Murray, bass clarinet; Donal Fox, piano. Evidence Records 22131-2.
Variants on a Theme by Monk. Oliver Lake, alto saxophone; Donal Fox, piano. Music & Arts CD-732.

SELECTED VIDEOGRAPHY

- The Fox/Troupe Project*, PBS Television, *Say Brother*, WGBH TV Boston (1993).
Following the North Star Boogaloo. Quincy Troupe, poet/reader; Donal Fox, piano.
Donal Fox and David Murray in Session, PBS Television, *Say Brother*, WGBH TV Boston (1993).
Vamping with T.T., *Becca's Ballad*. David Murray, bass clarinet and tenor saxophone; Donal Fox, piano.

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- Banfield, William C. *Landscapes in Color: Conversations with Black Composers*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., forthcoming, spring 1998.
Rankovic, Catherine. "Donal Fox: Composer, Musician, Pianist and Improviser." *The St. Louis American*, March 19, 1992.

Executive producer: Vivian Taylor

Recording engineer: Alan Mattes

Digital editing: Alan Mattes

CD mastering: George Blood Professional Audio Services, Philadelphia

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River Town Packin House Blues, *The Old People Speak of Death*, and *Following the North Star Boogaloo* were performed at the Fox/Troupe Duo Concert presented by Videmus on November 5th, 1993, at Edward Pickman Concert Hall, Longy School of Music, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and were recorded live by WGBH Radio, Boston. This recording is made available courtesy of WGBH Educational Foundation. Alan Mattes, recording engineer; Steve Schwartz, producer.

T-Cell Countdown and *Gone City* were recorded May 23, 1994 in Boston. Alan Mattes, recording engineer; Vivian Taylor and Donal Fox, producers.

Ballade for Clarinet and Piano was recorded February 18, 1993 in Studio One, WGBH Radio, Boston, courtesy WGBH Educational Foundation. Alan Mattes, recording engineer; Richard Knisely, producer.

Jazz Sets with T.T. was recorded at the African Meeting House, Boston, November 1991. Tom Clark, recording engineer; Mark DeVoto, producer.

Digitally recorded live to two-track. Digital editing on Sonic Solutions.

Mr. Fox's compositions on this recording are published by Leonellis Music (BMI).

Mr. Troupe's poetry is from *Weather Reports: New and Selected Poems*. Published by Harlem River Press (1991).

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