

CORE ENSEMBLE
Bending The Light

New World Records 80559

As the twentieth century ends and the twenty-first begins, a musically interested person might well wonder about chamber music: its creation, its performance, and its viability both in the concert hall and on recordings. Performers will always want to play the great eighteenth- and nineteenth-century masterpieces, and each generation will have its favorite interpreters of this old and venerable repertoire. But what draws contemporary composers to a genre whose very name conjures up gilded music rooms in dusty palaces or languid salons of long-gone societies? And what brings performers to new works of chamber music in a culture now dominated by louder and larger forms of musical expression?

As is apparent on this disc, the attraction of chamber music is much the same now as it has always been: An intimate group offers performers the greatest opportunity for individual expression, coupled with the most challenging, most exposed ensemble playing—an arena where everything counts, and every detail is audible and essential. For the composer, chamber music continues to provide a context for the most searching statement, the greatest invention of form and the freest exploration of expression.

The six works presented here, five trios and one duet with amplification, speak their unique musical truths with distinctive voices. All six composers make reference to non-musical imagery in titling and describing their works (Dan Welcher's *Tsunami*, Marilyn Shrude's *A Window Always Open on the Sea*, and Ross Bauer's *Tributaries* make reference to water or sea imagery; Marjorie Merryman's *Bending the Light* and Peter Lieuwen's *Nocturne* invoke ideas of light and darkness, and Judith Shatin's *1492* draws an image of conflict from historical events). Given that modern music has no predictability in terms of language or design, it is not surprising that metaphor is called upon to help the listener come into each work's unique world of color, shape, motive, and form. What is interesting, though, is how different these works are from one another. In contemporary hands, chamber music is the most personal of genres; the medium inspires the unique poetry of the individual soul.

The disc begins with Dan Welcher's *Tsunami*, a one-movement piece written in 1991 with the assistance of a grant from Chamber Music America. The composer writes:

The title *Tsunami* is the Japanese word for “tidal wave.” The phenomenon starts with an undersea earthquake or a volcanic eruption that sends an invisible seismic shock through the water. It is only as the shock hits land, recoils, and takes ocean swells back with it that the wave begins to form. In successive landings, recoilings, and re-landings, this force finally spends itself, its huge wall of water flooding everything in its path, sometimes to a height of 100 feet or more.

Although Welcher's piece doesn't attempt to depict a tsunami, he draws on Eastern-influenced pitch formations (pentatonic scales), as well as the image of successive shock and accumulation, to shape the first part of his work. As he describes this process:

The initial percussive "shock" that opens the piece creates a stir in the form of a cello motive marked "swelling" and employing long portamenti pushing upward. After a second shock, the cello motive begins an "undersea" journey—very slow and lyrical at first, accompanied by non-pitched percussion only. Eventually the piano joins, first with echoing bass notes, then with a rather mechanical motive on the high keyboard. This force grows, the cello line climbs higher and higher, until another double shock is heard—perhaps the energy has hit land?

As the shock-energy accumulates, an increasingly frantic counterpoint adds to the tension, with canonic imitation first between the marimba and cello, then among all three players. This texture reaches its height at a triple cadenza, with each musical strand spending its last energy, and then winding down.

As the dramatic shape of the tsunami subsides, the second part of the piece begins. This rondo-like section is marked "Dancing," and begins with a main theme rising in the marimba. Contrasting sections alternate with statements of the main material, in an atmosphere that the composer describes as one of "joyous kinetic energy." The sound world here, as in the first half of the work, uses several pentatonic scales, as well as sonorities reminiscent of the Balinese gamelan. The rhythmic, dancing vigor grows all the way to the end of the piece.

In the same way that Dan Welcher has taken a natural phenomenon as the starting point for a musical shape, Judith Shatin, in her work *1492*, has adopted a historical moment as the inspiration for a musical rhetoric. She writes:

Fourteen ninety-two was a year of both exhilaration and turmoil: the excitement of Columbus's voyage to the New World; the expulsion of Jews from Spain; the invasion of France by Henry VII. 1492, inspired by these events, sets, stretches, and breaks boundaries. This one-movement, tripartite work for amplified piano and percussion plays with the exchange of gesture and content, the pianist metamorphosing into a percussionist and the percussionist into a keyboard player, particularly for the work's central section. The players storm into each other's territory in the outer sections; only the middle section offers a more contemplative view of the exchange.

The idea here, then, is that the musicians act like explorers or invaders, each entering into the domain of the other. Instrumental color, range, method of attack, as well as pitch and rhythmic material, are all subject to conflict and transformation. In the opening, for example, low, rumbling piano figures break into a rhythmic dialogue with the aggressive attacks of the unpitched percussion instruments. Both sides seem equal in their rhythmic insistence, neither willing to "give in" or to play an accompanimental role. The section ends, seemingly with the piano exhausted, falling in register, diminishing in attack, until the percussion, also slowing down, briefly takes over.

In the second section, in a much quieter atmosphere, the piano presents a more melodic idea, with beautiful timbral manipulation. The use of amplification in the piano adds unobtrusively to the coloristic possibilities. When the vibraphone enters (the first sound of any pitched percussion), its

sonority subtly varies that of the piano. Only commenting at first, the vibraphone ultimately takes over both the melodic and timbral material of the piano. A transition, in which the piano becomes more energetic and insistent, leads to a final section that once again seems to pit the players against one another. Building up the tension with cymbal rolls and piano tremolos, the music ends in a series of crashing attacks in rhythmic unison.

Marjorie Merryman's trio *Bending the Light*, like the first two works here, uses a metaphorical title not just for color, but also as a pathway into the form and procedure of the music. As the notes that accompanied the premiere (in 1989) state:

The title refers to the process by which the pure, unstructured sounds of the prelude are refracted through the prism of developing motive, counterpoint, and phrasing, "bent" ultimately into form.

The work begins with a short prelude, a somewhat unstructured statement of material that will be developed extensively in the first two movements. The main body of the first movement is fast, motivic, and rhythmically intense. The piano and percussion's mallet instruments (marimba and vibes) often shadow one another, coloring each other's harmonies and figurations. The form is rounded, with the beginning of the fast material returning quite audibly near the end. The second movement is lyrical, both expressively personal and melodically expansive, pushed along by the cello's long song-like line. At the end of this movement, the music of the prelude returns, but what was once unstructured is now organized and contained. Through the prism of the first two movements, what was unstructured and latent has become clear and defined. *Bending the Light* finishes with a fast rondo-like movement, in which the periodic return of material is on the music's surface and is easily heard. The percussion part becomes increasingly exuberant, ending with a flourish.

The title metaphor in Ross Bauer's one-movement trio *Tributaries* refers to the idea of individual streams of music (the first three sections of the work) feeding into a larger body (the final section). The image is both a formal one, and also a description of character. As Bauer has said, "The title is meant to characterize music which is continuous and always in motion."

Each of the first three sections features a solo instrument. The cello begins, rising out of the opening sonorities into a long, lyrical song in the higher registers. During this beautiful extended melody, the other two players comment, amplify, support, or foreshadow music to come. As the cello concludes its solo, intensifying into octaves (foreshadowing the fourth section), the piano becomes more assertive and active. It gathers energy from trills and figuration, almost constantly moving. The tempo is increasing, the cello is still remembering its lyrical music, and the *misterioso* mood is one of agitation held in check. A long registral ascent leads to the third section. Here, the percussion takes on the solo role, first featuring the glockenspiel, then the marimba, and finally the unpitched instruments. The tempo continues to quicken into the fourth and final section, the climactic ensemble goal. As the composer explains,

Octaves and double octaves appear, first primarily in the piano, with cello and marimba figuration, then, *maestoso*, in all three instruments in the only extended rhythmic unison passage of the piece. The final pages (marked *barbarous*) do nothing to discharge the considerable tension. They're in an even faster tempo and of an almost violent character.

With the buildup of fast tempo and pulsing meter, the ensemble pushes the piece to its intense conclusion and, perhaps in keeping with the image of constant fluidity, vigorously resists any notion of rounding off.

In Peter Lieuwen's *Nocturne*, a depiction of the natural world is made through the eyes of another artist, Van Gogh. As Lieuwen explains,

Inspired by Vincent van Gogh's painting "Starry Night," *Nocturne* (1993) emphasizes the unique coloristic capabilities of the instrumental combination of piano, cello, and keyboard percussion (marimba, vibraphone, glockenspiel, and crotales). With the vertical pillars of sound (introduction and coda) symbolizing dusk and dawn, the main body of the piece is a soundscape, illuminating nocturnal events both real and imagined, pleasant and frightening.

After the chordal introduction, a first "nocturnal event" is presented as a long melody in the cello accompanied by delicate figuration in the piano. This music sets the tone for the events to come, for almost every succeeding episode contains defining quasi-*ostinato* figuration. The idea of *Klanfarbenmelodie* (tone color melody) plays an important role in articulating the distinct sections, and in coloring the melodic material. The center of the piece intensifies rhythmically in all parts until an agitated piano solo breaks loose. Rising, increasingly frantic figuration in the piano creates the climax, with cello *glissandi* adding to the sensation of late-night wildness. This dramatic high point is broken off by a huge crash. From this point on, the music seems to turn back (toward dawn, out of the world of the night, perhaps), as the delicate piano figuration returns, and the cello now slowly sliding down into the chordal texture of the opening. The last work presented here, Marilyn Shrude's *A Window Always Open on the Sea*, is the longest and, in terms of specifically evoked imagery, the most complex. As Shrude explains,

In searching for a way to express the emotion felt in a year filled with deep personal loss, I used the words of poet and friend Michael Mott to inspire this statement in sound. The movement titles are lines taken from Mott's poem *Autumn, Odysseus* (1989). (The poem is published in *Tar River Poetry*, vol. 33, No. 1, Fall 1993; the lines quoted in this work are used with permission.)

The titles of the seven movements, and their individual characters as indicated in the score, give perhaps the best and clearest insight into this emotionally rich work. These titles are: I. "In the name of a name lost" (*In haste, breathless; nostalgic, suspended*); II. "Harsh is the voice that summons" (*Dramatically; with intensity*); III. "Down sunglazed bluffs" (*Presto—driving*); IV. "Mother-of-pearl glow" (*With longing mystery*) and "Greed of a gull" (*Anxiously*); V. "The tide spreads, enters coppery inlets" (*Relentlessly*) and "Blurred red by the light" (*Presto—with force*); VI. "As the sun drowns"

(Majestically waning) and "You climb the dark stairwell" (*Hauntingly*); VII. "Hermit of the heart . . . Nothing is changed for a name" (*Serenely, with grace*). The work is dedicated to Shrude's father.
—*Marjorie Merryman*

Dan Welcher's music has been played by some of the world's leading performers, including the symphony orchestras of Chicago, Dallas, and St. Louis. He has been commissioned by such renowned institutions as the Boston Pops, the Cleveland Quartet, mezzo-soprano Jan DeGaetani, and the American Brass Quintet. A recipient of grants and awards from the Guggenheim Foundation, the NEA, ASCAP, and the American Music Center, Welcher was formerly composer-in-residence with the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra. He holds the Lee Hage Jamail Professorship in Composition at the University of Texas School of Music (Austin).

Marjorie Merryman's music has been played by leading musicians throughout the United States, as well as in England, France, Poland, Greece, Russia, Israel, and Taiwan. Among her awards are prizes from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the League-ISCM, as well as fellowships and grants from Tanglewood, the Bunting Institute, and the National Endowment for the Arts—Meet the Composer program. Her works are published by C. F. Peters, APNM, and Margun Music. Former composer-in-residence of the New England Philharmonic, Merryman is chairman of the Department of Theory and Composition at Boston University School for the Arts.

Judith Shatin's orchestral and chamber music has been widely performed by such groups as the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Da Capo Chamber Players, the Kronos Quartet, and the Houston, National, and Richmond symphonies. Among her many awards are four composer fellowships from the NEA, as well as grants and fellowships including those from the American Music Center, Meet the Composer, Bellagio, the Lila Wallace—Readers Digest Arts Partners Program, and many others. Her music is published by Arsis Press, Lawson-Gould, Plymouth Music, C. F. Peters, and Wendigo Music. A professor at the University of Virginia, Shatin is also Director of the Virginia Center for Computer Music.

Ross Bauer teaches composition and directs the Emyrean Ensemble at the University of California at Davis. His music has been played and recorded by such renowned groups as the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Speculum Musicae, the New York New Music Ensemble, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, Earplay, Triple Helix, and many others. His prizes include the 1997 Speculum Musicae National Composers Competition, The American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the League-ISCM, and he has received commissions and fellowships from the Guggenheim, Koussevitsky, and Fromm Foundations, and from the NEA. His music is published by C. F. Peters exclusively.

Peter Lieuwen's compositions have been performed by leading musicians in the U.S. and Europe, including The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Saint Louis Symphony, the Mexico City Philharmonic, the Kozalin State Philharmonic, the Ravel String Quartet, Western Arts Trio, Larry Parsons Chorale, and many others. He has received awards from The National Orchestra Association, Meet the Composer, Inc., the League-ISCM, and the Contemporary Record Society. His music is published by MMB Music. He is Associate Professor of Music, composer-in-residence, and coordinator of the Music Program at Texas A&M University.

Marilyn Shrude has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Cleveland Arts Prize, the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award (orchestral), and a Composer Fellowship from the NEA. Her music has been played by many orchestras, including those of Toledo, the Curtis Institute, Bowling Green, and the Chicago Civic Symphony; and by leading chamber ensembles, such as the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Saint Louis Symphony Chamber series, and many others. Her works are published by the American Composers Alliance, Editions Henry Lemoine (Paris), Neue Musik Verlag Berlin, Southern Music, and Thomas House. A professor at Bowling Green State University, she also directs the MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music, and co-directs the Annual New Music & Art Festival.

Since its inception in 1993, the **CORE Ensemble** (Andrew Mark, cello, pianist Hugh Hinton, and Michael Parola, percussion) has garnered international recognition for its efforts to commission new works featuring its unique instrumental combination, offering concert and residency programs for diverse audiences throughout the United States. In 1995 the CORE Ensemble was the recipient of a three-year Chamber Music America Residency Grant based at the Duncan Theatre at Palm Beach Community College in Lake Worth, Florida. The CORE has also served as Ensemble in Residence for the New Music Festival at the Boston Conservatory, and has participated in community outreach programs sponsored by the Community Music Center of Boston. The CORE Ensemble specializes in producing new multigenre works in collaboration with artists from the dance, theatre, and visual arts media. The 1996–97 season included the premiere of Martin Brody's theatre piece *Earth Studies*. In 1997–98 the CORE premiered and toured nationally *Of Ebony Embers—Vignettes of the Harlem Renaissance*, commissioned by the Duncan Theatre/Palm Beach Community College and the Harid Conservatory of Boca Raton, Florida. They also commissioned and premiered Bernard Rands' Triple Concerto with a consortium of orchestras: the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, the New Hampshire Symphony, the Waterloo-Cedar Falls, Iowa Symphony, and the Florida Philharmonic. The 1998–1999 season features the premiere of *El Mozote*, a new theatre work with a score by Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez and Osvaldo Golijov. In 1996 New World Records released the CORE Ensemble's first CD, Donald Martino, *A Jazz Set* (New World 80518-2).

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Dan Welcher

Abeja Blanca. Jan DeGaetani, mezzo-soprano; Philip West, English horn; Robert Spillman, piano. Bridge Records BRI 9048.

The Bequest. Judith Kellock, soprano; Laura Gilbert, flute. Gasparo Records GSCD-314.

Brass Quintet. American Brass Quintet. Summit Records DCD187.

Castle Creek Fanfare. Summit Brass. Summit Records DCD 127.

Evening Scenes. Paul Sperry, tenor; Voices of Change, Dan Welcher conducting. Crystal CD740.

Haleakala: How Maui Snared the Sun. Honolulu Symphony, Donald Johanos conducting. Marco Polo 8.223457.

Hauntings. Symphonia Tuba Ensemble. Mark MCD.

Piano Concerto. James Dick, piano; Round Top Festival Orchestra, Pascal Verrot conducting. Round Top RTR 003.

Judith Shatin

Adonai Ro'i. New York Concert Singers, Judith Clurman conducting. New World Records 80504-2.

Fasting Heart. Patricia Spencer, flute. Neuma 450-95.

Gabriel's Wing. Patricia Spencer, flute; Linda Hall, piano. Neuma 450-95.

Ignoto Numine. Monticello Trio. CRI 583.

Kairos. Patricia Spencer, flute. Neuma 450-95.

Ruab. Prism Chamber Orchestra. CRI 605.

Marjorie Merryman

Dog Day Rag. Virginia Eskin, piano. Koch 3-7440-2H1.

Ross Bauer

Along the Way. Griffin Music Ensemble, Stephen Mosko conducting. GM Records GM 2032CD.

Octet. Empyrean Ensemble, Ross Bauer conducting. Centaur CRC2386.

Peter Lieuwen

Angelfire. Orchestra of the Americas, Paul Freeman conducting. Pro Arte/Fanfare CDS 3413.

Marilyn Shrude

Into Light. Bowling Green Philharmonia, Emily Freeman Brown conducting. Albany Records Troy 321.

Drifting Over a Red Place. John Sampen, electric sax. Capstone CPS-8636.

Renewing the Myth. John Sampen, saxophone; Marilyn Shrude, piano. Neuma 450-80.

Evolution V. Chicago Saxophone Quartet. Centaur CRC 2086.

Producer: Joel Gordon and the CORE Ensemble

Engineer: Joel Gordon

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Dan Welcher (b. 1948)

1 *Tsunami* (publ. Theodore Presser Co.) 11:20

Judith Shatin (b. 1949)

2 *1492* (publ. Wendigo Publ.) 8:27

Marjorie Merryman (b. 1951)

Bending the Light (publ. Association for the Promotion of New Music)

3 I. 4:20

4 II. 3:46

5 III. 2:35

Ross Bauer (b. 1951)

6 *Tributaries* (publ. C. F. Peters) 13:20

Peter Lieuwen (b. 1954)

7 *Nocturne* (publ. MMB Music) 7:08

Marilyn Shrude (b. 1946)

A Window Always Open on the Sea (publ. American Composers Alliance)

8 I. "In the name of a name lost" 4:07

9 II. "Harsh is the voice that summons" 3:15

10 III. "Down sunglazed bluffs" 1:50

11 IV. "Mother-of-pearl glow" 3:55

12 V. "The tide spreads, enters coppery inlets" 2:15

13 VI. "As the sun drowns" 1:20

14 VII. "Hermit of the heart . . . Nothing is changed for a name" 1:40

The CORE Ensemble

Andrew Mark, cello

Hugh Hinton, piano

Michael Parola, percussion

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