

The long and illustrious career of American composer Henry Brant can be framed by the music he has written for the flute. The Pulitzer Prize-winning composer's three epic works for multiple flutes do not fit into any standard category of instrumentation or form; rather, they span the creative life of a man who for all of his life has been referred to as a "maverick," a "pioneer," an "experimentalist," and, since the 1950s, the "world's leading composer of 'spatial' music," in which the placement of the musicians around the performance space is as important a compositional element as the timbre, time, or pitch. It is with the development of his use of space as an intrinsic part of his musical vocabulary that Brant established himself as a major figure in American music of the twentieth century. His formal studies included work with Wallingford Riegger and George Antheil, and Edgard Varèse was also an influence. But Brant's work in this "fourth dimension" of composition makes him unique in the history of American musical individualists, on a parallel footing with his friends and contemporaries Ives, Ruggles, Cage, Partch, and Harrison. His receipt of the 2002 Pulitzer Prize in Music was perhaps the first time an "experimental" composer had won the prize since Charles Ives did so in 1947.

It has never seemed to me that life is a simple matter, and I have always felt that music can reflect everyday existence, with its many complicated events both internal and external. A mundane episode in everyday life is not a one-dimensional event. People pass one another unaware of each other's needs and fears. For me, spatial amalgams of highly contrasted musical events, freely associated yet controlled, present opportunities for representing in the concert hall musical equivalents of the incessant bombardment of social and environmental catastrophes which bedevil daily existence. —Henry Brant¹

The composition of *Angels and Devils* is well documented. Brant wrote the work, now recognized as the first flute orchestra or "flute choir" piece of the twentieth century, in 1931 at the age of eighteen, after having heard a performance of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* and being struck by the unique use of five flutes in the orchestration. Impressed by the beauty of the playing of the French flutist Georges Barrère, a professor of flute at The Juilliard School, he contacted Barrère through an introduction from his former composition teacher Wallingford Riegger and offered to write a piece for multiple flutes for Barrère to lead with his students. Barrère was encouraging, and, according to Nancy Toff in her book *Monarch of the Flute*, the first reading was conducted by Barrère with Frances Blaisdell playing the solo part. The work, scored for solo flute, three piccolos, five flutes, and two alto flutes, was originally titled *Concerto for Flute with Orchestra of Ten Flutes*.

Barrère continued to be supportive of Brant's efforts with the piece and helped arrange for several performances, the first of which was at Carnegie Chapter Hall on February 6, 1933, under the auspices of the Pan-American Association of Composers with Barrère as soloist and the composer conducting.

After the initial interest in the piece in 1932 and 1933, Brant told Nancy Toff (in an interview published in the New York Flute Club Newsletter of March, 2003, p. 6) that "nothing happened for about twenty years, absolutely nothing. . . . Then I won an award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the award was a recording of a piece of chamber music up to thirteen players. So at that time the flute player whose playing I knew best was Fred Wilkins, who'd played in the original performance. So he took it very seriously. He said, well we're going to get the best people in town, and he did. And we played it in public a few times. And as far as caliber of supporting personnel and preparation, we've

¹ Henry Brant, "On Henry Brant's Music." Henry Brant's home page/David Jaffe, www.jaffe.com/brant.html

never had a performance equal to that.” Since this recording, the piece has been played hundreds, if not thousands, of times around the world, and Brant refers to it as his one and only “big hit.”

This recording of *Angels and Devils* is a re-mastering of the historic LP released on CRI in 1956. Brant’s compositional precociousness in this seminal work is creative and sophisticated. The harmonic language features a generous use of jazz-like polychords with up to eleven notes, one pitch for each instrument, alternating with a playfully light, less dense “normal” harmonic vocabulary, often borrowing from the popular music language of his musical environment. Through careful doublings and a full use of the range of the piccolo and alto flutes (which were still in very little use in the early 1930s, particularly in chamber music), Brant creates a fresh and buoyant harmonic color. He incorporates and combines both the harmonic and rhythmic feel of the jazz styles of his time with such compositional devices as the fugue (the development section of the sonata form that defines the first movement, and the dissonant short fugue in the second). The *Angels and Devils* notation of a jazzy rhythmic feel was the composer’s first effort of many in this regard, and it is an uncanny success: It is a rare composer who can be so exacting with jazz rhythms that sound so spontaneous. Not all of the sounds are formally derived: Brant exploits all of the sonic possibilities of the flute family, including multiple tonguing (double, triple, and flutter), measured vibrato (a technique never previously explored in notated music), and many bird sounds, multiple trill sections, etc. There is a particularly simple and effective use of unisons of the three members of the flute family in three registers.

Perusing Brant’s prodigious list of works, it is clear that his interest in exploring sonorities created by multiples of one instrument (or as the Carl Fischer catalogue summarizes, “Instrumental Ensembles of a Single Tone Quality”) was something he returned to again and again. There is *Orbits* for 80 trombones; *Flight Over a Global Map* includes 50 trumpets; *Rosewood* for 50 or more guitars; and *If You Don’t Like Comets, Get Out of the Solar System* for two groups of fire truck sirens!

The two later pieces of Henry Brant on this recording are examples of his creative use of multiple instruments from the same family in a spatial compositional context.

The *Mass in Gregorian Chant for Multiple Flutes* (subtitled *Mass for June 16*), composed in 1984, is scored for as many flutists as possible with approximately twenty percent of the flutists doubling on piccolo, all playing material provided in the *Graduale Romanum* for masses sung on June 16. The source material, a book which contains the Gregorian chant for the entire liturgical year, and music of this period in general have always held an interest for Henry Brant; certainly the frequently antiphonal nature of its performance in the great acoustics of the European cathedrals is an influence on his interest in creating a spatial component for his own work. Brant’s own program notes for the *Mass* state that the “rhythmically uncoordinated configurations of the chant reveal melodic contours which automatically produce their own unique harmonic idiom.” The concept is simple and the results are uncannily beautiful: The flutists encircle the audience, and the beginning of each phrase is conducted with the flutists observing a strict unison. At a given moment, the conductor drops his or her arms, and the flutists are encouraged to move slightly ahead, or fall slightly behind, their neighbors. The resulting sonorities of this fractured unison simulate the decay of the acoustics of the great cathedrals as the audience is surrounded by what is essentially an artificially created decay.

The work was premiered on June 16, 1984, under Brant’s direction, during the week of ten all-Brant concerts presented at the Holland Festival in Amsterdam. It has been performed in venues as diverse as

a hotel ballroom in Washington, D.C., at the National Flute Association convention in 1992, Seattle's Saint James Cathedral (as an actual part of the Mass), and at the Boeing Museum of Flight, always with an uncanny magical effect.

In a discussion I had with Henry Brant at his home in Santa Barbara in August 2005, he told me that as a young man, he hoped that *Angels and Devils* would “represent [me], and it did after several attempts.” His hopes are the same for *Ghosts and Gargoyles* (subtitled *Spatial Soliloquies*), his third work for multiple flutes, composed seventy years after the completion of *Angels and Devils*. (He also mentioned that he composed *Ghosts and Gargoyles* to show that he “wasn't slipping!” at the age of 88.) In the composer's words, “Commissioned by Toronto's New Music Concerts, *Ghosts and Gargoyles* was composed in the summer of 2001 [after Brant and I had discussed the idea several years before]. The work is scored for solo flute (also playing piccolo and bass flute) with an octet comprised of piccolos, C-flutes, alto flutes, and bass flutes, plus a jazz drummer. The stage is occupied only by the soloist, the conductor, and the jazz drummer. The four duos of the octet are located in the four corners of the hall. Occasional quotations from ecclesiastic music by Allegri and Palestrina are intended to suggest ghostly intimations. *Ghosts and Gargoyles* was envisaged as a quasi-sinister sequel to Brant's much-performed *Angels and Devils*.”² The work was premiered in Toronto on May 26, 2002, under the composer's direction with Robert Aitken, who had commissioned the work, as soloist.

There are three principal thematic elements in *Ghosts and Gargoyles*. The first element directly quotes from the antiphonal church music that Brant is so fond of. Following an introduction, played by the soloist on bass flute while walking on stage from the wings, the flute ensemble performs a quotation from the eight-part Allegri *Miserere* (the same music as in the famous story about Mozart, who, against Vatican rules, copied the score after one hearing when he was a child). In the reprise of the Allegri, Brant adds a “Bach-like” cadence, finding the original phrase ending to be too “tame.” In the second type of musical material in the piece, which occurs several times, the conductor becomes less of a timekeeper and more of a “form director,” leading a semi-aleatoric band and cuing in the pairs of flutists in the corners of the hall according to very specific instructions in the score. The pairs of flutes coordinate their own two parts independently of the others, resulting in a texture of sounds over which the soloist plays. The flute writing in both the *tutti* sections and solo interludes contains a panoply of extended techniques ranging from microtonal trills to pitch bends to multiphonics. According to Brant, the jazzy sections—the third thematic material, the sections with the drummer that occur twice in the work—connect with our own contemporary experience. Brant has had a long-standing interest in jazz (at one point in his career he earned part of his living by making jazz arrangements), and his expertise in notating jazz rhythm gives the music a natural swing. The harmony in these fully notated and virtuosic sections is a by-product of the individual lines rather than the other way around, and the notation really succeeds in accomplishing a true jazz feel, with a piccolo solo soaring over a dense accompaniment of flutes and drums. In the penultimate section of the work, the soloist returns to the C flute and “wails in a Jewish style,” with note bends and glissandi, over the Palestrina *Missa Papae Marcelli* eight-part material before exiting the hall with a final bass flute soliloquy.

—Paul Taub

Paul Taub is professor of music at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, and flutist and executive director of the Seattle Chamber Players.

² Henry Brant, Composer's program notes for the premiere of *Ghosts and Gargoyles*.

Born in Montreal of American parents in 1913, **Henry Brant** began composing at the age of eight. After moving to New York in 1929, he composed and conducted for radio, film, ballet, and jazz groups, while also composing experimental works for the concert hall. Starting in the late 1940s, he taught at Columbia University, Juilliard, and, for twenty-four years (1957–1980), at Bennington College. Since 1981, he has made his home in Santa Barbara, California.

Brant is America's foremost composer of acoustic spatial music. The planned positioning of performers throughout the hall, as well as onstage, is an essential factor in his composing scheme and a point of departure for a radically expanded range and intensity of musical expression. Brant's mastery of spatial composing technique gives him access to textures of unprecedented polyphonic and/or polystylistic complexity, providing maximum resonance in the hall and increased clarity of musical detail for the listener. Brant's principal works since 1950 are all spatial. His catalogue now comprises more than 100 such works.

In the early 1950s Brant came to feel that "single-style music . . . could no longer evoke the new stresses, layered insanities, and multi-directional assaults of contemporary life on the spirit." In keeping with Brant's belief that music can be as complex and contradictory as everyday life, his larger works often employ multiple, contrasting performing forces, as in *Meteor Farm* (1982) for symphony orchestra, large jazz band, two choruses, West African drum ensemble and chorus, South Indian soloists, large gamelan ensemble, percussion orchestra, and two Western-style solo sopranos.

Brant's spatial experiments have convinced him that space exerts specific influences on harmony, polyphony, texture, and timbre. He regards space as music's "fourth dimension" (after pitch, time, and timbre). Brant continues to experiment with new combinations of acoustic timbres, even creating entire works for instrumental family groups of a single timbre: *Orbits* for 80 trombones, *Ghosts & Gargoyles* for multiple flutes, and others for multiple trumpets, flutes, and guitars. This predilection for ensembles of a single tone quality dates from *Angels and Devils* (1932). Brant does not use electronic materials or permit amplification in his music.

Brant's spatial music has been widely performed and recorded in the United States and Europe, and his long career has been recognized by numerous awards and honors, most recently the 2002 Pulitzer Prize in Music for *Ice Field* (2001). Other honors include two Guggenheim Fellowships, the *Prix Italia* (which he was the first American composer to win, in 1955), and the American Music Center's Letter of Distinction in 1982: "a pioneer of spatial and antiphonal music and a continuing influence on succeeding generations." He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1979. Brant received an ASCAP/NISSIM Award in 1985, a Fromm Foundation grant in 1989, and a Koussevitzky Foundation award in 1995 as well as Ford Foundation and NEA awards. Brant's work has found municipal recognition in an official Henry Brant Week in Boston (1983), in a special week of ten all-Brant concerts at the Holland Festival in Amsterdam (1984), and in New York City's Certificate of Appreciation (1992). The Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel has acquired Brant's complete archive of original manuscripts, which includes more than 300 works (1998). Brant received the honorary degree of Doctor of Fine Arts from Wesleyan University in September 1998.

Robert Aitken, flutist, conductor, composer, and teacher, became principal flutist of the Vancouver Symphony at age nineteen and co-principal of the Toronto Symphony (under Seiji Ozawa) at twenty-

four. He played for five years in the CBC Symphony under Karl Böhm, Hermann Scherchen, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Aaron Copland, and Igor Stravinsky. Honored with the Order of Canada Award, he has been a prize winner in the Concours International de Flûte de Paris, and the Concours International de Flûte pour la Musique Contemporaine at Royan; he has received the Canada Music Citation, the William Harold Moon Award and the Canadian Music Medal, all for support of Canadian music at home and abroad. He spent four summers at the Marlboro Music Festival and three at the Stratford Music Festival. He founded and directed Music Today and Music at Shawnigan, and directed Advanced Studies in Music at the Banff Centre for Fine Arts. More than fifty new works have been composed for him by George Crumb, Elliott Carter, Toru Takemitsu, and R. Murray Schafer, among others, and he himself has written a number of major works for flute and other instruments. Mr. Aitken is professor of flute at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik (Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany) and artistic director of New Music Concerts (Toronto, Canada).

Mr. Aitken studied with Nicholas Fiore at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, with Julius Baker and Frederick Wilkins (the soloist in *Angels and Devils*), and with Marcel Moyse, the eminent French flutist and pedagogue, whom he considers his major teacher.

The **New York Flute Club**, founded in 1920 by Georges Barrère, is the oldest continuously operating flute club in the world. From its earliest years, its annual concert series has featured prominent guest artists from around the world, and many Club programs have included flute ensemble music and the work of contemporary composers. In recent years its programs have broadened to include jazz and flute music of non-Western traditions.

As part of its mission to promote new music for the instrument, programs have featured many premieres and have drawn attention to the works of such flutist-composers as Lamar Stringfield, Quinto Maganini, Philippe Gaubert, Walter Benedict, Harvey Sollberger, Otto Luening, Henry Brant, and Gary Schocker. The Club published Robert Russell Bennett's *Rondo Capriccioso* for four flutes in 1922; in 1948 Eldin Burton won the Club's first (and only) composition competition for his *Sonatina* for flute and piano. In 1996, the Club commissioned works for flute ensemble from Elizabeth Brown and Katherine Hoover.

In the 1960s the Club inaugurated a competition for young artists, formalizing its support for emerging talents. After many years of presenting guest lecturers and master classes with visiting performers, in 1994 it incorporated all those activities into an annual flute fair. The idea for this Henry Brant recording project grew out of the New York Flute Fair of 2003, when Robert Aitken performed *Ghosts and Gargoyles* at the concluding concert. The Club made its first recording, *The Flute in American Music*, to commemorate the American bicentennial, and in 1988 issued a CD in honor of flutist-composer Otto Luening. It has presented two exhibitions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, *From Hotteterre to Barrère* (1980) and *Georges Barrère and the Flute in America* (1994). The Club also runs a year-round ensemble program for members and a community outreach program that involves young music students around the city.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The Henry Brant Collection, Volume 1. Includes *A Plan of the Air*, *Northern Lights over the Twin Cities*. Innova Recordings 408.

The Henry Brant Collection, Volume 2. Includes *Nomads*, *Ghost Nets*, *Solar Moth*. Innova Recordings 409.

The Henry Brant Collection, Volume 3. Includes *Trinity of Spheres; Wind, Water, Clouds & Fire; Litany of Tides*. Innova Recordings 410.

Kingdom Come, Machinations. Oakland Youth Orchestra, Oakland Symphony, Gerhard Samuel conducting. Phoenix PHCD 127.

Orbits, Hieroglyphics 3, Western Springs. CRI 827.

Verticals Ascending. The Northwestern University Symphonic Wind Ensemble, John P. Paynter conducting. New World Records 80211-2.

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HENRY BRANT (b. 1913)

Music for Massed Flutes

THE NEW YORK FLUTE CLUB

80636-2

Ghosts and Gargoyles (2001) 21:30

(published by Carl Fischer, LLC.)

1. I. 4:01
2. II. 3:56
3. III. 1:02
4. IV. 2:07
5. V. 2:24
6. VI. :51
7. VII. :20
8. VIII. 1:38
9. IX. 1:15
10. X. 3:42

Kathleen Nester, Svjetlana Kabalin, piccolos; Bart Feller, Paul Taub, flutes; Stefani Starin, Sue Ann Kahn, alto flutes; Dianne Aitken, Patti Monson, bass flutes; Jeffrey Kraus, drum set; Donato Cabrera, assistant conductor; Robert Aitken, soloist and conductor

Mass in Gregorian Chant for Multiple Flutes (Mass for June 16) (1984) 14:39

(published by Carl Fischer, LLC.)

11. 1. Introitus 2:41
12. 2. Gloria Patri 1:04
13. 3. Gradual 2:35
14. 4. Alleluja I :57
15. 5. Tractus 2:44
16. 6. Alleluja II 1:25
17. 7. Offertorium 1:30
18. 8. Communio 1:19

Dianne Aitken, Leslie Allt, Alice Barmore, Ardith Bondi, Laura George, Lucille Goeres, Emily Hodges, Don Hulbert, Rochelle Itzen, Sue Ann Kahn, Karl F. Kraber, Gerardo Levy, Katherine McClure, Karen Purpura, Jayn Rosenfeld, Seth Rosenthal, Pamela Sklar, Stefani Starin, Paul Taub, Barbara Williams, Patricia Zuber, flutes; Robert Aitken, conductor

Angels and Devils (1931) 20:21

(published by MCA/Universal Music Publishers)

19. I. 8:51
20. II. 3:41
21. III. 7:31

Samuel Baron, Frances Blaisdell, Philip Dunigan, Harold Jones, Andrew Lolya, Claude Monteux, Harry Moskovitz, Murray Panitz, Lois Schaefer, Kenneth Schmidt, flutes, piccolos, alto flutes; Frederick Wilkins, soloist; Henry Brant, conductor

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