

James Mulcro Drew (b. 1929) is a Modernist. He considers Art to be a holy or religious experience and it is this for which we are ultimately in this world. Like Abraham Maslow, who coined the term “peak experience,” Drew assumes that we are able to satisfy our physical and safety needs but that we exist in order to self-actualize, to regularly enjoy “peak experiences.” Peak experiences are profound moments of happiness and understanding wherein one can seemingly see the world from a higher plane and from where things seem to be suspended or moving more slowly, moments wherein we can more easily make decisions or see relationships and/or meanings, experiencing moments of love and understanding above the humdrum of daily existence. A peak experience in music is available to listener, performer, and creator.

Drew is a composer full of curiosity, deeply embedded in the act of musical creation. At the heart of composition for Drew is the act of music-making itself—the moment-to-moment act of listening, of deciding whether to add a sound, a chord, a melodic phrase, or not—of waiting and allowing sounds to assume their own life and shape or to slightly modify the color of a note by adding a tremolo or vibrato or to play it an octave higher or lower than its previous appearance. His art is concerned with the immediate moment of music becoming—with the moment of one’s being.

Nicolas Slonimsky has described Drew as an “authentic member of the American Experimental Tradition”—but what does he mean by this? With a composer such as John Cage, one finds experimentation with the materials and structuring, a definition whereby all sounds are music, whereas with Morton Feldman, one finds some similarities of exploring varying musical materials and an exploration of methods of structuring before he finally settles upon “the long hard stare” at a few materials—somewhat akin to standing close to a canvas by Clifford Still. Standing next to a Clifford Still painting, one is subsumed in the surface and loses all sense of an eternal shape or structure. Thinking about what Slonimsky might have meant by his statement, I think of another member of that tradition, Harry Partch. Drew, like Partch, has always been a loner—not a member of any school or movement, has remained largely outside the U.S. university patronage system and has remained “on the move”—a nomad—rather than settling in one environment. Like Partch, James Drew has made his own brand of theater as well as being a composer, and he has no hesitation to run against the fashion or canon of our time. He is a composer who is fascinated by all kinds of music, and as a result his own musical surfaces may be more highly varied—for instance the *Street Funeral Music* vs. *12 Centers Breathing* vs. *The Lute in the Attic*—than those of other composers.

Initially Drew was a pianist, and in a sense this was the formative experience for his entire creative life. He played written music but also became involved in improvising and took his first professional work as a jazz pianist. This is fundamental to understanding Drew’s art and aspirations inasmuch as a jazz pianist is both creating something new in the moment and is listening to what is being done (while often keeping the original music in his/her head simultaneously). This means that the act of creation is central to one’s being and that one has a highly developed non-verbal comprehension of the world.

With regard to formal compositional considerations, Drew has always favored the cyclical form. One might think this is also a result of his early experience as a jazz musician, but I think there is more to it than just that connection. It is true that he can remember one melody while he is making a variation on it, but his use of the cyclical form is more akin to Gertrude Stein’s structural use of repetition (*The Making of Americans*) in order to create a continual presence. The instructions for *Solemn Acts in Rain* occur in a similar wording in every score on this CD since it is central to Drew’s approach to the musician’s involvement in the creation of his music:

This work is to be performed slowly and softly, as a remembrance. The form is circular. On repeats performers can modify modes of production, registers (single or groups of pitches) and add expressive colours.

These variations become perceptible through the act of repetition. The repetition builds out the score—in one sense like a twelve-bar blues structure—but also in a Gertrude Stein sense of being here and now in the sound world.

In *Animating Degree Zero*, composed in 2003 for the Noko-Nu Ex Ensemble and premiered by them in Tokyo during that same year, Drew uses a larger formal evolution of twenty-three “zones” or sections which has the two trombones gradually becoming more and more prominent and disruptive of the calm surface created by the other instruments. He arranges a slow progression of evolving sections—each of which is both similar to but different from its predecessor—thereby creating his desired formal evolution. Twenty of these twenty-three sections are repeated while individual players are free to make subtle variations within their parts. The continuous sonic evolution of *Animating Degree Zero* is aptly described by a quote from one of Drew’s notebooks:

Music is either sound or silence. As long as I live I shall choose sound as something to confront a silence. That sound should be a single, strong sound. —Toru Takemitsu

I have long agreed with my colleague Toru Takemitsu that there should be “strong” sounds placed in just the right places. In my case, those sounds have also been slow moving long resonating structures. That’s strong. —James Drew

In *Bonaroo Breaks (Street Funeral Music)* from 2003 (composed for James Fulkerson and Hilary Jeffery), one hears the “curious” American Experimentalist James Drew. Whereas Cage and others experimented with materials, Drew has often explored differing music styles—in this case the music of a New Orleans funeral procession. The drummer precedes and finishes after the trombones—creating an illusion of a procession coming toward and passing by the pedestrian listener. Meanwhile the two-man “band” plays a score which consists of six sections with two to three modules for each player. The piece has a determined macro-form: a given beginning, four inner sections, and a given ending. The moment-to-moment content is determined by the immediate choices by the players. *Bonaroo Breaks* was premiered in Amsterdam in January 2006 on an Internet broadcast from Zaal 100.

12 Centers Breathing was composed for the Noko-Nu Ex Ensemble and premiered by them in Tokyo in 2001. *12 Centers* can be played as a viola solo or with optional percussion (gongs, ringing metal, and vibraphone). In *12 Centers Breathing*, Drew has created a series of twelve “sub-forms” which are first performed in their numerical order but then are “developed” by combining them in any order the soloist desires. In addition there are two Refrains which are musically more extended than the “sub-groups” or melodic cells. While developing the “sub-forms,” the soloist should change the pitch registers, modes of production, dynamics, and durations in an organic motion. When done in concert, the violist should be dressed in red with a tight baby spotlight on the instrument; the percussionist is dressed in black with tight baby spotlights on his/her instruments. Both the music and the performance actions should be done in a slow manner creating a sense of “floating movements.” This is also a sacred work.

In a version for solo viola, the violist (and listener?) focuses mainly on the “text” which is being created by the assemblage of the violist’s choices. This “text” becomes altered, hesitates and expands in the “bed of resonances” created by the percussionist. Using these means, Drew creates a similar poetry but a different poem in each version—and, of course, in each performance.

The Lute in the Attic takes its name from the poem by Kenneth Patchen on which it is based. It was commissioned by the soprano Ellie Judson and premiered by her in New Orleans in 1963. It is an important work for Drew in that it represents some experimentation and “loosening up” in notation for him. It consists of parts only—there is no master score. *The Lute in the Attic* is included in the score anthology *Notations* assembled by John Cage in the mid-1960s, a collection that illustrated the breadth of notational approaches being employed by composers at that point in musical history. The solo part consists of three pages of graphic lines and various-size texts which combine to suggest the melodic shapes to be sung by the soloist. In this recording, the soloist is a bass-baritone, whereas originally the role was interpreted by a soprano. The instrumental parts—which also consist of three pages—are written as individual solos but with no overall score or vertical alignment. As such, each solo consists of a series of melodic cells with an indication how long each cell should last, separated by a silence of a given duration. While there is no master score, since the approximate durations of both melodic materials and silences are given by the composer, the soloist and the instrumentalists are able through rehearsing to decide generally when and where they might want to “place” their materials in relationship to the whole texture.

Solemn Acts in Rain was commissioned by the Goldsmith-Ritacca Duo in 2002 and premiered by them in that same year. It appears to be the most conventional score on this CD in that it seems to be through-composed and consists of eight sections, five of which can be repeated ad libitum by the performers. The instructions: *to be performed slowly and softly, as a remembrance*—are of course very important to establish the requisite performance mind-set but will accordingly vary the approach between each performance and different performers. In a score such as *Solemn Acts*, one sees Drew’s commitment not to “the work of art” but to “the act of making art.” Correspondingly, the better one knows such a score, the more often that you have heard it, the greater the possible range of your appreciation of any performance. Nevertheless, as one listens to this work—its beauty, its satisfaction comes from being there in the moment, listening to its poetry. This is what James Drew seeks in his art—nothing more, nothing less—just be there in the moment. . . .

In Memoriam J.C. Higginbottom was composed for me (James Fulkerson) in the memory of the great jazz trombonist, J.C. Higginbottom. It was composed in 2005 and premiered by me in Amsterdam in Zaal 100 in 2006. Drew’s first professional engagements were as a jazz pianist in a band that featured Higginbottom as the trombone soloist. When the leader said, “Higgy, take it for a while,” Higginbottom quite often replied, “Just the piano and me” and proceeded to play “Dear Old Southland”—itself based upon the spiritual “Deep River”—with James. *In Memoriam J.C. Higginbottom* likewise is based on “Deep River” or “Dear Old Southland.” I must confess that I was stymied for some time over James’s encouragement to “make it mine” as I was not finding what seemed to me to be this desired freedom. One day, I thought, How would you really do this score if it were your performance of James’s tribute to J.C. Higginbottom? I hope to have achieved that by using the long reverberation time (90”) which has now developed into a sort of extended trombone for me. I could never achieve the wonderfully expressive “gutbucket” sound that Higginbottom got on the recordings that I know (albeit these were always uptempo songs, not ballads) but I have hoped to make a tribute of elegance to Higginbottom through the notes of James Drew.

—James Fulkerson

James Mulcro Drew was raised in New York City and began music studies at age five. His adult music studies began in the 1950s, when he studied counterpoint, harmony, and composition with Wallingford Riegger. During the early 1960s, Drew's work began to take on an independent musical direction; with such works as *The Lute in the Attic* (1963) and *Music for Three Muted Pianos* (1964), followed by *Primo Libro De Referencia Labarinto* (1967), radical notational concepts appeared for the first time in his work. He has since worked in theater, creating his own companies and an interdisciplinary Theater Laboratory for students to expand their knowledge through all arts. Drew and Mary Gae George have been co-directors of the Greywolf Performing Arts Institute since 1990.

While teaching at Northwestern University (1964–66), Drew began composing a series of small works that children would be able to perform. His interest in bringing new music to children continued when he joined the faculty of Yale University (1967), where he began creating what would later be known as the Greywolf Performing Arts Institute, advocating learning by creating—his response to students not knowing the arts. In 1972–73, the composer was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and during the same time he was Fromm Foundation Orchestral Composer at the 1973 Tanglewood Music Festival, where Gunther Schuller conducted the BSO in the world premiere of his *West Indian Lights*. Also in the 1970s, Drew's first works for theater were composed and produced, which included *Cruxifixus*, *Song of Death* and *Bluelight Dancing*. In 2008, he completed his Fourth Symphony. Since the 1990s, he has continued to work and tour under the auspices of the Greywolf Performing Arts Institute, and as a freelance composer/pianist/playwright, composing a broad spectrum of chamber and orchestral music.

Drew's theatrical concepts continue in his large ongoing work with the Nighttown Operatheater, the *Surprise Operas Cycle*, which now spans over two decades—*The Clown's Evening*, *From a Howl Whispered* and *The Voice* (2008). James Mulcro Drew's music is published by Theodore Presser Company and Artistry Press International and is available worldwide. Recordings of his works are available on Music and Arts, Nine Winds, Greywolf Recordings, Maximus, and Cinnabar Records.

Bass-baritone **Charles van Tassel** began singing as a chorister in his native city, New York. In 1965, he made his debut with the Contemporary Chamber Players under the direction of Ralph Shapey, making subsequent performances with the Chicago and Boston Symphony orchestras. He began his opera career in Germany in 1968; since that time, he has interpreted more than one hundred roles. From 1997–2000 Van Tassel was a permanent guest in the opera ensemble of the Theater of Basel. In 1975 Van Tassel moved to The Netherlands and became a Dutch national. There he has performed with, among others, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, de Nederlandse Opera, La Petite Bande, and Anima Eterna. He has appeared in the Hague Bach Festival and the Holland Festival as well as in television, film, radio, and on many recordings (including a CD of Charles Ives songs with the pianist Marien van Nieukerken). In 1997, he gave a debut in New York's Carnegie Hall with a recital of Dutch and American lieder. His career has taken him to most European countries, the United States, Canada, and Israel.

The Barton Workshop is an Amsterdam-based ensemble founded in 1989 by the American composer-trombonist James Fulkerson. The ensemble is committed to performing experimental music. They primarily create “composer portrait” concerts, usually in collaboration with the composers, providing either an overview or an in-depth representation of the chosen composer's work. The Barton Workshop has collaborated with composers such as Alvin Lucier, Christian Wolff, Nicolas Collins, Steve Lacy, Philip Corner, Hyo-shin Na, and Frank Denyer, giving world and European premieres of works by all of the above plus Galina Ustvolskaya, Henryk Gorecki, Ernstalbrecht Stribler, James Fulkerson, Jerry Hunt, and others. They have made important recordings of the works of Morton Feldman, John Cage, Christian Wolff, Alvin Lucier, Philip Corner, James Tenney, Jerry Hunt, Galina Ustvolskaya, James Drew, Frank Denyer, and Fulkerson himself.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Cantobolosolo. Included on *Bertram Turetzky: Tenors, Echoes and Wolves*. Nine Winds Records NWCD 0200.

Ex Profundis . . . The Orangethorpe Aria. Leslie Morgan, soprano; Russell Harlow, clarinet; The Mirecourt Trio. Cinnabar Records CNB 103.

Sonata for Cello and Piano (“Appassionata”). Included on *Cello America, Vol. 2*. Terry King, cello; John Jensen, piano. Music and Arts CD 1066159.

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Drew, James. *Intentions in the Arts*. <http://greywolf-artistry.com>

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Meckna, Michael. “James Drew.” *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, ed. by H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie. MacMillan Press Limited: London, 1986.

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JAMES MULCRO DREW (b. 1929)
ANIMATING DEGREE ZERO
THE BARTON WORKSHOP
80687-2

1. *Animating Degree Zero* (2003) 11:45
Eleonore Pameijer, flute/alto flute; John Anderson, clarinet; Marieke Keser, violin; Max Knigge, viola; Anne Magda de Geus, cello; Stefan Pliquett, contrabass; Frank Denyer, piano, celesta; James Fulkerson, Hilary Jeffery, trombones; Enric Monfort Barbera, percussion; Jos Zwaanenburg, conductor
2. *Bonaroo Breaks (Street Funeral Music)* (2003) 8:38
Hilary Jeffery and James Fulkerson, trombones; Tobias Liebezeit, drums
3. *12 Centers Breathing* (2002) 12:08
Manuel Visser, viola; Tobias Liebezeit, percussion
4. *The Lute in the Attic* (1963) 7:22
Charles van Tassel, baritone; Jos Zwaanenburg, flute; John Anderson, bass clarinet; Anne Magda de Geus, cello; Tobias Liebezeit, gongs
5. *Solemn Acts in Rain* (2003) 8:39
Marieke Keser, violin; Frank Denyer, piano
6. *In Memoriam J.C. Higginbottom* (2005) 14:17
James Fulkerson, trombone with digital reverberation

TT: 63:16

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